

The definition of myth. Symbolical phenomena in ancient culture

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Introduction

THE PRESENT article aims at making a contribution to the definition of myth as well as to the discussion about the substance of what is commonly referred to as 'myth.' It does not pretend to give the final answer to all questions related to this intricate problem, but to offer some clarification at the present moment, when the term 'myth' is freely in use among classical scholars without always being sufficiently defined. In fact the question of definition seems indeed to be avoided. In addressing this question I will proceed along two lines and study the nature and 'existence' of myth from a social as well as from a biological point of view. We have to ask how 'myth' operates in the particular culture we are studying, and to consider how the human mind does in fact function in a special 'mythical' way, studying its relationship to conscious reasoning. By adducing insights from anthropological theory I hope to contribute to the definition of the term and by presenting some results from psychology I wish to substantiate the claim that 'mythical phenomena' can be said to be generated by some 'mythical mind.' Both answers amount to the conclusion that 'myth' does in fact exist, if we study what I provisionally call 'myth' as a subspecies of what commonly is labelled 'symbolic phenomena.' This term refers to processes and entities which constitute a complex force in the creation and maintenance of culture.

My justification for these choices is the situation that within our field of classical studies we are deprived of studying phenomena like 'myth' within their living context. This condition may prompt us more easily to project our own scholarly habits of documenting and conscious arguing on the object of our study, thereby distorting the phenomena or denying their existence altogether. However, by making serious attempts at countering these unwanted effects of our own activity, we may become more aware of the nature of 'myth.'

I do not claim to present radically new insights, in fact they are established discourses within the fields to which I refer. However, these insights do not seem to

be sufficiently incorporated into our classical studies, which, unfortunately, are bound forever to study the cooled vestiges of living cultures.¹ It is my wish to bring in some life or third dimension into a research field that is working within the deserted space of art and the two-dimensional world of paper. In addition I will discuss a few concrete examples, hoping to stimulate renewed discussion and further investigation.

Terminology and ontological status

Before starting on the vexed question of definition, I wish to make some preliminary statements. Some scholars within our field of classical studies are so dissatisfied with the general application of the term 'myth' so as to deny the existence of 'myth' as a distinctive social phenomenon as well as that of 'mythical thought.' However, the situation that has led them to these conclusions, I think, has partly been due to our imprecise distinctions and loose terminology, partly to insufficient attention given to the nature of the phenomena involved. I will make this clear in the following discussion.

Marcel Detienne, discussing the development of mythological studies, points to the ethnocentric bias in the distinction between 'fable' and enlightened discourse in early Western research on 'mythology,' which understood itself as 'une science du scandaleux.'² He has rightly pointed to the inacceptability of Western habits of relegating stories presented by 'the natives' to 'myth' while accepting our own religious and other tales as 'the truth,' thus separating the grotesque from the sensible, the immoral from the moral. 'L'anthropologue est un homme des frontières: entre les sauvages et les civilisés, entre l'enfance de l'humanité et son âge adulte, entre nous et nos ancêtres.'³ This attitude is of course nothing but an instance of the universal (?) habit of confronting the 'other' vs. the 'self,' combined with a Western 'colonial mentalité' of assuming a fundamental segregation between the culture of 'the natives' and our Western, contemporary, 'enlightened' world.⁴ The use of the term 'myth' in this sense, a category for defining other people as less developed is of course inherent in Wilhelm von Nestle's 'Vom Mythos zum Logos' concept.⁵ It is also prominent in the work of G. S. Kirk.⁶

1 Cf. the anthropologist Gill 1982:37 'We have shown that much of the significance of artifacts is inseparable from the context of the cultural and religious processes and associated beliefs and principles from which they rise ... Now we should see that commonly these objects come about as a result of human actions which are creative in the primary sense, that is, in the sense of bearing cosmic responsibilities, in the sense of making life possible.'

2 Detienne 1981:36 (1986:13), reviewed from an anthropological viewpoint by Traube 1986.

3 Detienne 1981:45 (1986:19), 'The anthropologist is a frontiersman. Between savages and the civilized, between the childhood of mankind and its maturity, between ourselves and our ancestors.'

4 Ohnuki-Tierney 1990:2.

Recently Claude Calame, agreeing with Detienne, has formulated the problem as follows: '... myth is not an entity with any ontological existence, but rather a Western category which originated in the early days of anthropological thought, during the Enlightenment. As a spatially and temporally marked tool of classification, the category "myth" is generated by the act of looking at the cultures of others from a Eurocentric perspective ...'⁷

Earlier, Calame expressed himself in the same vein, 'Définitions [of myth] si larges ... ne font que démasquer le fait qu'il n'y a pas *d'essence* ni du mythe ni de la mythologie (emphasis added).'⁸ The question whether 'myth' is only a fiction of Western or Eurocentric culture, I think, should be reformulated into a discussion about our justification (or moral right?) to qualify as 'myth' what 'natives' recognise as 'nature' (a short-hand for metaphysical, historical, social, biological or whatever reality, cf. Pettazzoni 1947-48, referred by Lincoln 1983:76). In other words the question whether or not 'myth' is nothing more than a Western fiction amounts to the question whether we as academics may make meta-statements about 'native' expressions, that is, whether the category of 'myth' is an academic fiction or not. I do not think this is so, unless most of Western science is seen as an academic fiction too, an imposition of secular analysis on what is seen as sacred by (some, most?) other cultures. However, if we include Westerners and academics among the 'natives,' I think we can confidently proceed to study 'myth' as a phenomenon with an ontological status, although it is an elusive one, due in fact to its special nature, a problem to which I shall return.⁹

The suspicion Calame throws on looking at the cultures of others from a Eurocentric perspective is in fact the dilemma of the study of myth. It can in fact hardly be studied otherwise than by looking at the cultures of others, which implies that

5 Nestle 1966:6 'Diesen Weg vom Mythos zum Logos zu gehen, aus der Unmündigkeit zur Mündigkeit des Geistes emporzuwachsen, scheint den arischen Völkern als denen der höchstbegabten Rasse vorbehalten geblieben zu sein.'

6 Kirk 1970:24 'Why should we not say instead, for instance, that the association of myths and rituals in certain social conditions is due to the propensity of men, especially in uninhibited and savage societies, for acting out any event or description whatever, whether real or fictitious?' Kirk 1974:15f., '[the Cambridge School] rightly perceived that Greek myths are not utterly removed from savage ones as a kind of superior species.'

7 Calame 1996b:23. Cf. Calame 1999:121 'We recognize myth as a notion of modern Western anthropological thought.' Calame has expressed scepticism as to the motives for identifying an entity 'myth.' Calame 1988:10 'De tels concepts [myth and mythology] n'ont pu s'imposer que dans une pensée anthropologique encore fortement marquée par la croyance au primitif, et par conséquent à l'irrationalité d'une pensée humaine au seuil de son développement.'

8 Calame 1988:9.

9 Detienne's refusal to accept the notion of myth, has been countered by Brisson 1982, 1998, who has attempted a definition of myth according to formal properties of the tale.

people belonging to other than European cultures will be best qualified to point to the myths of our cultures, or that Western scholars have to defamiliarise themselves thoroughly from their culture in order to study 'their own native myths.' While dissociating ourselves, then, from previous views of myth, we should realise that earlier bias in those studies does not necessarily render studies of 'myth' altogether suspect.

Furthermore Calame points to the fact that the Greeks lacked a term for what we identify as 'myth.'¹⁰ However, this fact that the Greek term 'muthos' (μῦθος) does not refer to a distinct category of tales among the (early) Greeks, does not need to halt us either. There were some expressions which referred to what many would call 'myth,' the great exploits of ancestors, heroes and demi-gods, understood as belonging to the more or less remote past. The terminology which the Greeks could apply to this past was *ta palaia* (τὰ παλαιά), 'the ancient [things, events].'¹¹ What is interesting about this term is that it does not refer to a particular kind of tales, but to certain events, which underscores their status as reality. About these events, according to a wide-spread opinion, it was difficult to achieve firm knowledge, and poets are often accused of making up a story because of this lack of precise knowledge. This does not imply that the basic truth of the existence of gods and heroes is being denied.¹² The absence of a term for 'myth' may be due to the elusive nature of the phenomena in question. It may in fact be an encouraging sign of the serious status of the tale. We need then not be alarmed by this lack of a native vocabulary for what we would call 'myth,' since there may still be phenomena that should be distinguished systematically from discursive and argumentative speech. This does not mean that we are returning to a primitive or irrational man, only that we are trying to understand tales, that for the Greeks in fact were 'the truth,' from an exterior perspective.

Calame however has split his objections to the concept of 'myth' into an ethical and an intellectual part:

10 Calame 1988:9; Calame 1991:181; Calame 1999:122, 131f.

11 Calame 1991; Calame 1996a:39. We meet expressions as ἔργα, πράξεις, deeds of our forefathers' as well, e.g. Isoc., *Paneg.* 59, *Panath.* 151, who chooses to begin his account at a more remote time (πορρωτέρωθεν 120) referring to 'πράξεις περὶ τῶν προγόνων,' when presenting events at the time of Theseus (175). Dem. *Epit.* lx [1391] 'πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ διεπράξαντο,' with the example of the battle against the Amazons (8), 'τάκείνων ἔργα' (9). In this context Demosthenes uses the expression 'οὐπω μεμυθολόγηται' as a parallel to being recorded in epic, that is 'not yet being recorded in poetic form,' distinguishing the deeds of the younger generations by the criterion of having taken place in a more recent age 'ὑπογυώτερ' εἶναι τοῖς χρόνοις' (9). On the question of native terminology see also Burkert 1979a:3 n.14. Lincoln 1997 focuses on the dynamic character of terms like 'logos' and 'mythos' and the way intellectuals strategically used one or the other to further their cause.

'If we abandon the 'essentialist' connotations of the category which we perhaps naively construct as 'myth,' then we restore to the narrative manifestations of sym-

- 12 E.g. Hesiod uses 'logos' for his tale about the primordial races (Hes. *Op.* 106), Pindaros contrasts the true 'logos' about Pelops with embellished 'muthoi' *Pi. Ol.* i:28f., Herodotos contrasting the historical epochs dividing king Minos (to us a figure of myth) and Polykrates, the ruler of Samos about 530 BC, tells that the latter lived 'in the human age. τῆς δὲ ἀνθρωπίνης λεγομένης γενεῆς' (Hdt. iii:122). The distinction seems to correspond to our distinction between prehistory and history. The historian Thoukydides is of the same conviction. 'We know by report that Minos was the most ancient person to acquire a naval power (Μίνως γὰρ παλαιάτατος ἂν ἀκοῆ ἴσμεν ναυτικὸν ἐκτήσατο' Thuc. i:4,1). He apologises for having presented a record which lacks τὸ μυθῶδες, 'the myth-like, poetically embellished? element,' (for the negative connotations in Isokrates see Papillon 1996:16), and therefore may be less attractive to the listener than truthful ('οὔτε ... ἐπὶ τὸ προσαγωγότερον τῇ ἀκροάσει ἢ ἀληθέστερον' Thuc. i:21,1 cf. i:22,4, where Thoukydides applies the term 'ἀγώνισμα,' which Sifakis 1997-98:27 translates as 'a piece for public performance in the immediate future; or, a composition to be presently performed in public'). However, he does not doubt the historicity of the Trojan war (Thuc. i: 3,3). Diodorus from Sicily, writing in the age of Augustus, discusses the difficulties of those who are composing ancient (hi)stories (Diod. Sic. iv:1, τὰς παλαιὰς μυθολογίας), due to the fact that 'the antiquity of that which is to be recorded makes it difficult to find out about them (ἡ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἀναγραφόμενων ἀρχαιότης δυσέυρετος οὔσα πολλὴν ἀπορίαν παρέχεται τοῖς γράφουσιν), and causes much confusion to those who are writing, and the record of the dates (χρόνων) not admitting of the most accurate proof causes the readers of the (hi)story (τῆς ἱστορίας) to feel contempt [for it]. In addition the variety and the multitude of the heroes and demi-gods and the other men to be presented in genealogies makes the record difficult to arrive at. But the greatest and most baffling circumstance is the fact that those who have written down the most ancient events and stories (τὰς ἀρχαιοτάτας πράξεις τε καὶ μυθολογίας) are in disagreement among each other. For that reason the writers of greatest esteem among the later historians (ἱστοριογράφων) have given up the ancient record (τῆς μὲν ἀρχαίας μυθολογίας) due to the difficulty [of the task] and undertaken to write about more recent events (τὰς δὲ νεωτέρας πράξεις)'. Plato (*Resp.* 382c,d) underscores the fact that our knowledge of the gods and heroes (τῶν παλαιῶν) is imperfect (καὶ ἐν αἷς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν ταῖς μυθολογίαις, διὰ τὸ μὴ εἰδέναι ὅπη τάληθές ἔχει περὶ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀφομοιοῦντες τῷ ἀληθεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος ὅτι μάλιστα, οὕτω χρήσιμον ποιούμεν ...). Discussing (*Resp.* 377de) the nature of false tales (μύθους ... ψευδεῖς), and the way people report badly or shamefully (κακῶς) about the gods and heroes, Plato (or Sokrates) uses the simile of a painter who does not succeed in drawing a proper likeness of his model, (ὡσπερ γραφεὺς μηδὲν εὐκότα γράφων οἷς ἂν ὅμοια βουληθῆ γράψαι) implying the existence of the model. Cf. Belfiore 1985:50, who argues that Platon primarily is concerned not with the factual deeds ascribed to the gods (about whom we do not know the truth), but with their nature (about which we know that it is nothing but good). Elsewhere Plato (or Sokrates *Leg.* 966c) argues 'Isn't it one of the most honourable things (καλλίστων) to know about the gods ... that they exist and what power they prove to possess as so far as a human being is in a position to know these things' (ὡς εἰσὶν τε καὶ ὅσης φαίνονται κύριοι δυνάμεως, εἰδέναι τε εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἐστὶν ταῦτ' ἀνθρώπων γινώσκειν). Aristotle discussing the subject matter of tragedy (which for us belongs to the realm of Greek myth) states that the tragic poet should keep to this material, which he considers to belong to the realm of historical events (τῶν γενομένων ὀνομάτων *Poet.* 1451b15 ff.), cf. Veyne 1983.76f. (= 1988). Censorinus (*De natali* 21 Jahn) citing Varro, refers to the three epochs of history, the 'ἀδηλον' (the undemonstrable), the 'μυθικόν' (mythical/recorded in epic?) and the 'ἱστορικόν' (historical/recorded in genealogies etc.). For a survey of Greek criticism of myth see e.g. Dowden 1992:Ch. 3 'Greeks on Myth,' 9-53.

bolic thought their multiplicity of functions—among them, an *argumentative and then a rational one*’ (emphasis added).¹³

When Calame suggests that we should abandon the essentialist connotations of ‘myth’ so as to include *e.g.* the argumentative and rational functions (the “pragmatic” that is the rhetorical function’ Calame 1999:136f.) of ‘narrative manifestations of symbolic thought,’ he proposes to solve the problem while still clinging to some concrete tales (‘narrative manifestations’) or their nucleus.¹⁴ This is to propose that we should study the appearance and functions of some concrete tales, which we ‘perhaps naively’ have identified as myths or symbolic thought according to our common sense, or interest,¹⁵ a suggestion Calame may have adopted from Claude Lévi-Strauss, who stated ‘un mythe est perçu comme mythe par tout lecteur dans le monde entier’ (Claude Lévi-Strauss 1958:232, Traube 1986:82) This seems all well, except for the fact that in principle the question of identification is the fundamental one. Calame’s statement thus leaves open the problem what he means by the expression ‘symbolic thought.’ We cannot impressionistically single out some narratives without accounting for their inclusion into this category of ‘symbolic thought.’ My approach will be the opposite one, starting from a study of some ‘mythical’ or symbolic properties in order to identify tales (and other phenomena) that correspond to these criteria, whether they have been included into the category of ‘Greek myth’ or not. As will become clear, I will argue for the view that there are phenomena whose essence and functions are radically different from argumentative and rational thought.

Instead of denying the existence of ‘myth’ as Calame and Detienne do, we should acknowledge its ubiquitous existence, among the scandalous natives as well as among ourselves. I would thus suggest that we analyse Detienne’s and Calame’s proposition as two questions: whether particular tales labelled by us as ‘myth’ in fact are manifestations of the ‘symbolic’ phenomenon that will be defined as such, and whether there exists a particular ‘mythical thought, pensée mythique, mythisches Denken, pensiero mitico,’ a fact that is denied as well by Calame and Detienne.¹⁶

The present article is oriented by the thought that ‘myth’ or symbolic phenomena in general are universal, neither to be ashamed of nor to be despised, suspected or abolished.¹⁷ In addition, being an elusive phenomenon, ‘myth’ is—and here I

13 Calame 1996b:23.

14 Cf. Calame 1986:138 ‘une structure syntaxique nucléaire.’

15 Calame 1988:11f. ‘sens commun,’ ‘récits passionnants.’

16 Calame 1988:10 ‘... croire à l’existence d’une pensée mythique spécifique, c’est poursuivre le fantôme rousseauiste de l’Age d’or du prélogique.’ Cf. Calame’s paper at the Myth into Logos?—conference in Bristol 1996b, 1999:140. During the discussions at this conference the same was indeed generally denied. Cf. the contrary view in Perrin and Pouillon 1988.

17 Traube 1986.

anticipate some of my conclusions—effective as long as it is not recognised as such.¹⁸ As soon as a ‘myth’ is ‘revealed’ as ‘myth,’ it ceases to be ‘the truth,’ the natural way of being and doing, the undiscussed and unquestioned. It is therefore hard to detect our own ‘truths,’ and all the more the more fundamental they are. Myth and ‘truth’ are complementary concepts, the same tale seen from the outside and the inside respectively.

There is a special reason for classicists to address the question of ‘myth,’ because of the still wide-spread idea that the ancient Greeks in fact abolished ‘*muthos*,’ substituting ‘*logos*’ for this ‘naive mere telling of tales.’ While the Greek version of ‘*logos*’ may be uniquely Greek, I assume that rationality is as universal a human faculty as is ‘myth.’¹⁹ There are thus several reasons for studying the nature of ‘myth’ in order to disentangle the term from everyday or prejudiced meanings and to clarify the concept as a scholarly tool of investigation.

At this stage I would signal two dangers that lie in our path: unawareness of our role as observers may distort our observation, and unreflected choice of scientific metaphors may impede our understanding. One example are terms of intellectual faculties, such as ‘mythical or symbolic *thought*,’ and I would suggest, that (perhaps a decisive) part of the difficulties that have arisen in our quest for the nature of myth may be due to a choice of descriptive terminology. A result of this terminology (or its cause) is that it virtually focuses upon the scholarly activity of observation, documenting and description, and its concomitant thinking. It imperceptibly exchanges the experience of the observer for the workings of the object of study in its living context. Another example is the terminology which draws its metaphors from the sphere of physics or from the visual arts. The very term ‘*l’imaginaire*,’ for example, suggests some static picture on a wall. Images of painting on canvas or a framework freeze the living tale into a substance passively absorbing the ideological system, a kind of knowledge which thus can be deciphered in its texture.²⁰ This prompts us to investigate the ‘meaning’ of a myth.

18 Cf. Jean-Pierre Vernant, cited by Ellinger 1984:22.

19 Edward Sapir, who was familiar with native Amerindian cultures, firmly states: ‘Anyone who has been in contact with natives knows, [unless he is so devoted to his prejudices as to pay no heed to his observations,] that the pre-logical mind does not exist in them. [At least, it does not exist in them more than in ourselves.] Modern man is just as illogical as primitive man in many respects—politics for example. The only difference [between primitive man and ourselves lies not in the processes of thinking but in the fact that] we appeal to more sophisticated supernatural beings [and that we have accumulated a larger store of technical knowledge]’ (Sapir 1994:211).

20 Calame 1988:148 ‘[une définition sémantique] dessine l’*arrière-fond* idéologique sur lequel se détache la narration,’ ‘Et cette étude du *cadre* culturel donnant un sens et organisant en un système les valeurs actualisées par la narration devrait être menée pour chaque récit du corps ... ’ (149). We might prefer ‘symbolic *tone*’ referring to the field of music.

On the other hand, in attempts at defining myth or classifying tales the readily *observable*, reasonably enough, has been at the centre of interest. In order to capture some verifiable, that is commonly perceptible, features we have skipped the question whether the essence of 'myth' does yield to the demand for easily perceptible data. These have been assumed to be either semantic elements or a particular literary form or genre, which would constitute the basis for its definition, and prompted the search for some general narrative formula or plot structure.²¹ Kirk's energetic denial of the existence of some general form and function of myth is mostly due to this empirical approach, the demand that there should emerge some common denominator identifiable in the texts under scrutiny, preferably particular personae and plots. Or there should be found testimonia on ritual staging for all mythical stories. And when no such evidence was found it was concluded that no common feature is to be found.

However, our situation as observers is a problematic one. Firstly, being confronted with a complex phenomenon as 'myth,' there is always the difficulty of drawing a boundary between the object of study and one's own observation and we may risk making statements about ourselves rather than our object. For example, when discussing Ernst Cassirer's view of an 'association of myth with religion, ... the assumption that both involve a passionate response to the world ...,' Kirk dismisses this possibility with the argument that '... in hundreds of other myths [other than Gilgamesh and Genesis(!)] whether oral or literate, no special intensity is *detectable*' (emphasis added).²² When analysing the different functions of traditional tales, what Kirk describes as the properties of these tales, is very much what to him is readily observable and his (intellectual) reactions to the texts.²³

Secondly, as historians we have the duty to verify our statements by evidence, and we do not have access to anything else than a piece of flat paper, which manifests itself as a wall or a picture, corresponding to the 'wall' on which we attach our scholarly comments. Still we should remain aware of the fact that this is not the real object. To deny some 'mythical' entity or properties on the basis of the material conditions of our sources (and the observer's reactions to that) is like making statements on the behaviour of animals from a photograph. We as classical philologists are not witnessing living tales, not the vibrant telling situation (nor are we the recipients).²⁴

21 Calame 1988:9.

22 Kirk 1970:30f.

23 Kirk 1970:253ff. 'The first type is primarily narrative and entertaining; the second operative, iterative, and validatory; and the third speculative and explanatory ... myths [that] belong to the second type—they glorify famous leaders ...'

24 By way of contrast see the model investigation by Geertz 1974.

Traditional tales are to be studied in their living environment, their 'mythical' quality may be that special feeling in the members of the audience then and there, something withdrawn from our library observation. At this stage I would remind of the fact that tales, whatever their genre, are not only received at the intellectual level, they rouse emotions as well, which should be included in an interpretation. The problem I have signalled, then, may be the dilemma of 'the empirical scientist, who limits his area of inquiry to those data which are verifiable by empirically testable methods,' while anthropological research uses several explanatory models beyond pure description.²⁵

In particular when studying the elusive category of 'myth,' what really matters is the natives' reception, their experience, their reactions to the tale.²⁶ This reception includes their culturally structured perception of the world, a structure which has of course been studied extensively. But structure being again an abstraction, it answers primarily the observer's need for order, while not exhaustively accounting for the participants' experience and active creation of structure. The fact that we are studying phenomena which belong to the past, deprives us, of course, of having direct access to their affective aspects, this most important source of our study. Hence we have reasons for being pessimistic in identifying and interpreting 'myth.' However, emotions are also moulded into sentiments, in different ways according to genre, 'prescribed emotions' constitute part of the meaning of tales in performance. What we may hope for, then, is to detect some of the vestiges of this moulding, and reconstruct the event in a holistic approach.

Yet another problem with identifying and interpreting 'myths' by readily observable properties is that it ignores the fact that tales may 'aim' at telling and doing something else than what they profess to do. They may in fact attract attention to some superficial elements while leading attention away from the essential meaning, a question to which I will return.

One of the crucial criteria of symbolic phenomena then is to be found in their *reception*. These phenomena cannot be studied without taking into consideration the effect upon the audience. What we would need is a direct access to the complete setting and a thorough knowledge of the particular culture, which would give us the means of distinguishing between the overt purposes of the performance and the hidden cultural meaning. This would in addition make us more sensitive to our own culturally conditioned perceptions and professional habits. Instead of describing some intrinsic 'meaning' of the tale (possibly our own response), we

25 Saliba 1976:100f. See below.

26 Cf. Geertz' (1976) concept of 'experience-near' as opposed to 'experience-distant' description in anthropological fieldwork, which he illustrates with the distinction between the concepts 'fear' and 'phobia' respectively.

should inquire into *the effects upon 'them,'* and instead of thinking in static imagery or purely intellectual categories, we should apply metaphors from human activity: symbolic *'workings.'*

Myths and 'myth'

In spite of these problems, however, I will still argue for the view that at an abstract level there does exist some common denominator to our object of study. When we have abolished the notion of some primitive man contrasting with our enlightened Western humanity, as well as abandoned the search for some commonly observable kind of tale, there still may be something we could call 'myth.' A general cause of much misunderstanding in the field of our study is the fact that we are familiar with the concept of 'Greek mythology,' *The Greek Myths* being a corpus of tales expressed in different kinds of literature and visual arts, the tales of particular individuals as Odysseus, Oidipous, Helene, Medeia and so forth. Understood in this sense, the definition of 'myth' is clear and simple, a group of identifiable *tales*, which by corollary we consider as historically and otherwise 'untrue.' But while we can readily determine whether a tale was part of the corpus of 'Greek myths' or not, we have great difficulty in answering the question, what kind of phenomena 'myths' are, and in giving one single definition. This is due, of course, to the fact that we start with catching all kinds of fish into our net, only to conclude that there does not exist any unified kind of Fish.

The problem is found in the synchronic and in the diachronic dimension. First there is the problem of overlapping. Certainly there does exist a wealth of studies about the different functions and properties of (Greek) myths, including the efforts by Geoffrey Kirk, Walter Burkert, and their followers, but there are also a number of studies noticing that 'mythical' properties ('l'imaginaire' or 'perceptual schemata') might be found in other, contemporary, tales as well, e.g. the historical writings of Herodotos, Ploutarkhos and others (e.g. Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet and their followers, Claude Calame, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood). The suspicion that 'mythical' functions may be found in 'logic' discourse, that is, historiographical, philosophical and other scientific writings, creates confusion about the concept of 'myth.' The categories of 'Greek myths' and 'mythical' texts may thus partly overlap, partly constitute different fields.

The other source of confusion lies in the transmission of traditional tales to new environments, the fact that 'Greek myths' have been told in other contexts and ages than their original, where they do not serve the same function. This circumstance has prompted e.g. Jan Bremmer to peel off parts of the definition of myth proposed by Burkert.²⁷ In his view the tale does little more than provide the com-

27 Bremmer 1987.

munity with a focus of identity.²⁸ When found outside the Greek cultural community, *e.g.* among the Romans, the mythical tale perhaps is neither old, traditional, nor meaningful. In short, what we so readily acknowledge as 'Greek myths' can cease to be 'mythical' in the sense of definitions proposed for this kind of tales. These dilemmas of inclusion and exclusion make it difficult to define 'myth,' and when we start from the surface of the traditional tales found in Greece or the Near East, the problem of definition becomes acute.

The problem we are witnessing may be reduced, of course, if we reserve the (everyday) term 'myths' to a particular kind of tale that is easily recognisable as such *e.g.* by their names and basic plots, 'Greek myth,' 'Near Eastern myth,' 'Nordic myth' and so fort. Such tales belong to a corpus commonly identifiable as originating within a particular group, and thus, geographical area and age. We have, then, to consider other types of tales, which some of the scholars mentioned have singled out as instances of 'l'imaginaire' or 'cultural concepts.'²⁹

We should, then, avoid the term 'myth' outside the body of tales we identify as a group's 'traditional tales.' When studying the *workings* of these and other tales, we may instead refer to 'symbolic phenomena' with its anthropological sense, and study their properties. This has two advantages: we may study the workings of a particular tale or class of tales in a particular place and time, and its incorporation into a certain rite, without suggesting that the tale as such always works in that way. In addition, we may recognise similar workings in tales other than those belonging to the body of 'traditional tales,' thereby getting a more precise insight into the processes at work and a closer view of what has been recognised as the difference between 'mythos' and 'logos.' What I have provisionally labelled 'myth(ical)' I prefer to call 'symbolic phenomenon.'

Recognising then that the well-known 'myths/traditional tales' are not co-extensive with 'symbolic phenomena' and that non-traditional tales are not always just rational accounts,³⁰ we may suggest a term 'symbolic tales' in order to collect those forms of verbal expression that seem to manifest 'symbolic workings.'³¹ A parallel distinction would be found in cultural imagery and other collective expressions.

We may assume also that this 'symbolic quality' is not inherent in the narrative itself, but an aspect of narrative in performance and activated in the audience at a particular moment, who creates and enjoys its workings. This implies that the

28 Bremmer 1987:5.

29 See the next section.

30 Of course the category of individual poetic creation is a third category, which does not interest us at the moment.

31 By selecting this term I would stress the active and creative aspects of symbolic phenomena.

symbolic quality may be vivid or fade away, be revived and extinguished, and so, briefly speaking, I would distinguish 'hot' and 'cold' myths, e.g. those (traditional) tales which are told in cultural performance and those that cease to be so. Their symbolic focus may move from one accent to another, creating new patterns and changing experiences. I envisage a rather manifold body of (traditional) tales, with complex ways of telling, shifting from rational 'logos' to symbolic workings and back again.

It may well be that the mythos-logos distinction does not yield a clear-cut division between kinds of tales (texts), but rather constitutes an abstraction separating strands within a text, which I would prefer to label 'symbolic' and 'discursive' respectively. Hence I would preliminarily propose that we assume that tales move along the poles of a continuous range of expressions, the 'symbolic workings' manifesting themselves in different ways and at different points and moments of the tale.

Our next task will of course be to identify and analyse these processes. I will presently return to the concept of 'symbolic phenomena,' and account for expressions as 'performance,' 'workings,' and 'aim.' For the moment I think it useful to recapitulate some of the theoretical reflection that has been devoted to the concept of 'myth' within our field of classical studies.

The definition of 'myth' within classical studies

As Kirk so eloquently has shown, 'myths' stage a wide range of dramatis personae, and can have been put into a number of services, so as to defy any definition of function,³² the result being that he vigorously rejects any unified definition of 'myth,' although he does not deny the existence of (kinds of) 'myths.' The only single definition he can accept is that 'Myths are at the very least tales that have been passed down from generation to generation, that have become traditional.'³³

However, as we saw, tales staging 'mythical' personalities are not always of ancient date, some may demonstrably be new creations, the development of the Theseus myth being a clear example.³⁴ Since mythical tales may be modified in rather radical ways, ironically enough, even the minimal definition accepted by Kirk, 'a traditional tale,' may be inadequate as well. The only definition of 'myth' we are left with is 'a tale,' unless we save Kirk's definition by noticing the permanence of traditional names of the heroes in an in some other respects new tale.

We should try, then, to approach the problem of definition by starting with the existence of 'traditional tales,' that is, tales which not necessarily are of ancient date

32 Kirk 1970:253f.; 1974:18.

33 Kirk 1970:282; 1974:27.

34 Bremmer 1987:3f.

or transmitted over the generations, but which are accepted by a group and surrounded with special care. Often they will refer to the remote past, which lends them authority.³⁵ Discussing the most influential definitions that have been proposed I will suggest some further precision leading to the question of the nature and substance of the phenomena involved. 'Myth' has been defined as:

- *traditional tale* (Kirk),³⁶ a narrative, which is *not necessarily very old* (Bremmer),³⁷ but at least *transmitted by a group* (Burkert),³⁸
- *independent of any particular text* (Burkert, Graf),³⁹
- carrying an aura of *truth* ('*Verbindtlichkeit*'),⁴⁰ by appearing in the guise of a record of the past, hence *e.g. anonymous, lacking an author, but rooted in time and space* (Graf),⁴¹
- *without immediate reference* (Burkert),⁴² not referring to empirical reality, *but shaping it*, either by offering
- *programs of action*, plot/motifemes (Burkert/Graf with reference to Propp)⁴³ founded on basic biological or social programs of action,
- *i.e. guiding ritual processes*⁴⁴ usually *exaggerating the patterns of ritual practice* (Bremmer, Versnel),⁴⁵ or
- *systems of classification* and systems of ordering social life (Vernant),⁴⁶ creating boundaries, defining 'the other' (Hartog *et al.*)⁴⁷
- sometimes by creating *inversion* (Vidal-Naquet, Burkert *et al.*)⁴⁸

35 Alternatives may be 'dream time' or the future.

36 Kirk 1970:282, 1974:27

37 Bremmer 1987:3.

38 Burkert 1979a:2. Burkert is followed by Nagy 1990:8.

39 Burkert 1979a:5 'the identity of a traditional tale, including myth, independent as it is from any particular text or language and from direct reference to reality.' Graf 1987:8 'Der Mythos ist nicht der aktuelle Dichtertext, sondern transzendiert ihn: er ist der Stoff, ein in großen Zügen festgelegter Handlungsablauf mit ebenso festen Personen, den der individuelle Dichter nur in Grenzen variieren kann,' *cf.* Graf 1996.

40 Graf 1987:9f.

41 Graf 1987:8f.

42 Burkert 1979a:3

43 Burkert 1979a:18, Burkert 1979b, Burkert 1981. *Cf.* Graf, 1987:56.

44 Burkert 1979b:29, Versnel 1993a, reviving Jane E. Harrison's term *pari passu*; *cf.* Burkert 1980:175.

45 Bremmer 1984, 1978; Versnel 1993b.

46 *E.g.* Vernant 1974.

47 Hartog 1980.

48 *E.g.* Vidal-Naquet 1983, 1986; Burkert 1970.

- *signs/perceptual schemata*, structuring, stylising and filtering the perception of reality (Calame, Sourvinou-Inwood),⁴⁹ creating and conveying means of apprehending reality,
- *collective metaphors, generated by a concatenation of categories* (Scheid and Svenbro),⁵⁰
- referring to *something of collective importance*, ‘*angewandte Erzählung*’ (Burkert),⁵¹ the collective property of a community or group, which recognises it as ‘our tale’ and to which it is meaningful, referring to a supra-individual reality, ‘le “savoir partagé”’ (Scheid and Svenbro),⁵² a living tale, *rooted in a particular historical environment* and formed by its audience to be culturally meaningful (Brelich),⁵³
- *offering a focus of identity* (Bremmer) and Dowden,⁵⁴
- *justifying institutions* such as family, clan, city or tribe (Burkert, Dowden and others),⁵⁵

49 Calame 1982; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988a ‘conceptual schemata;’ Sourvinou-Inwood 1991:4, ‘conceptual universe.’

50 Scheid and Svenbro 1994:9 ‘Si, dans le sous-titre, le mot “mythe” nous a semblé préférable à “métaphore,” c’est que la métaphore que nous étudions dans ce livre est une métaphore partagée - faisant partie de ce qu’on appelle couramment le “savoir partagé” et non pas une création individuelle.’ Cf. their difficulty in distinguishing myth from other symbolic phenomena, ‘C’est en effet en pensant à ces difficultés que nous avons été amenés à voir dans le mythe *non pas un récit*, mais une simple concaténation de catégories. Concaténation grace à laquelle il devient possible, à l’intérieur d’une culture donnée, d’engendrer des récits mythiques, des images et des rituels dans le champs qui sont leur propres. Envisagé ainsi, le rapport entre le récit, l’image et le rituel, désormais à égalité entre eux, ne serait donc pas celui d’un reflet spéculaire mais d’une parenté, donnant aux documents respectifs un air de famille, dont l’origine est cette concaténation de catégories que nous appelons mythe’(10). ‘Ce qui veut dire, en bref, que le mythe, dans une culture donnée, est une ‘proposition’ simple, génératrice de récits, d’images et de rituels’(11).

51 Burkert 1979a:23, 26 ff. Cf. Burkert 1979b:29. He is followed by Nagy 1990:8.

52 Scheid and Svenbro 1994:9.

53 Brelich 1977.

54 Bremmer 1987:5, Dowden 1992.

55 Burkert 1979a:29, “‘Wirklichkeiten,’ über die mythisch, d.h. in Form von Erzählung gesprochen wird, sind zunächst soziale Ordnungen, Institutionen und Ansprüche von Familie, Clan, Stadt und Stamm.’ Dowden 1992: 74-92 Ch. 5 ‘Myth and identity.’ Blake Tyrell and Brown 1991:6 propose the following definition of Greek myth ‘*a tale rooted in Greek culture that recounts a sequence of events chosen by the maker of the tale to accommodate his own medium and purpose and to achieve particular effects in his audience.* As narratives that both exemplify and shape [Greek] culture, myths are words in action’ (emphasis in the original). Konstan 1991 attempts to characterise the substance of Greek mythology concluding that it preferred homogenous anthropomorphism against hybridisation, rational events and individual characterisation. All these I think are questionable propositions. There are a number of hybrids, fantastical events, tale types and character stereotypes in Greek mythology.

— sometimes a *religious* expression, a tale drawing the sensibilities of a religious congregation towards its magnetic centre (many).

Sometimes 'traditional tales' seem to support social norms and values by explicit moralising, Calame's 'argumentative and rational functions.' Presently I would consider them as 'Greek myths' employed in a didactic way, that is, being part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy. With this distinction I foreshadow the following discussion, in which I will emphasise the non-verbalised(-able?) aspects of 'symbolic phenomena.' Another function of traditional tales may be their strategic use in order to establish legitimacy (e.g. Herodotos *Hist.* 9:27).⁵⁶ A particular kind may be the creation of heroes with their 'biography' and the establishment of a grave cult as a pervasive culture-creating tendency, which can be found throughout history up to our age and culture, according to Pierre Vidal-Naquet.⁵⁷

The properties of 'myth' thus far presented have found wide acceptance among classical scholars. However, they may be considered within a general view and observations from religious studies and modern field anthropology.

Concepts and theories from modern anthropology

In other fields than classical studies the definition of myth has been difficult to arrive at too.⁵⁸ To Eliade myth has been a 'paradigmatic model of what happened in the original past ... a primordial event,' legitimising the present, and characterised by a basic pattern, a pattern in which opposite and contrary realities and statements are united harmoniously ... a *coincidentia oppositorum*.⁵⁹ However, the concept of 'myth' is most often given a far broader content and different attributes within anthropology. It is noticed that tales, which are identified as 'myth,' can present a wide range of themes, and can be owned by different social groups. These tales cannot be taken at their face value. The functions of 'myth' may be variously assessed, from unifying device, explanation of natural phenomena, justification of authority, power and status to inversion and expressions of conflict. 'Myth, however, is never a complete replica or reflection of a people's culture and it may contain exaggerated and inverted features of real life ... And not all myths represent a harmonious unity of social life; some, on the contrary, can be ... expressing and not solving social-psychological conflicts of a particular social structure or of certain distributions of power within society.'⁶⁰ Mythological accounts are not always

56 Connor 1970. The creative and spontaneous use of collective patterns in political action has been studied for several periods. Examples are Connor 1987, Strauss 1985.

57 See the interesting study on the phenomenon, 'Des dieux, des rois, des héros et des saints,' Vidal-Naquet 1993.

58 Cf. Saliba 1976:72ff. for this brief overview of the situation.

59 Saliba 1976:4f. Eliade is followed by Hübner 1985.

taken seriously by their audience and the degree of belief may vary. Not all societies seem to have a mythology, nor do myths necessarily refer to the past. Myths may point to the future as do millenarian tales. And the tales may present 'a lawless, asexual or promiscuous condition,' that is, the scandalous world as observed by Detienne's mythographers.⁶¹

Within these studies the concept of 'symbolic phenomena'⁶² or 'symbolism' has a firm tradition,⁶³ where it often refers to ritual. It seems, however, that much of what is said about symbolic behaviour, rites and so forth, includes traditional tales as well.⁶⁴ The distinction between rites and myths (and icons) is not an essential one, but sometimes useful for practical purposes, helpful only as seen from the observer's perspective. In terms of their origin and function they are inseparable: traditional tales, ritual behaviour, traditional images and physical arrangements.⁶⁵

The fact that the expression 'traditional' has been widely accepted may be due to a tendency of tales to be presented as 'our tradition.' However, as we have seen, this does not necessarily require factual age, and it may be helpful, with Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff to acknowledge this feature of 'being handed down' as a technique of creating 'the truth.' Studying what they call 'secular rituals,' they observe that these ceremonies (including mythical drama and so forth) have a tendency to become '*traditionalizing*,'⁶⁶ that is, these expressions are embedded in practices that confer authority on the tale. In the case of ritual, the essential fact is not that the practices have virtually been repeated for generations. The ritual process itself does not need to be age-old, but its stylised form rather suggests tradition by being 'attention-commanding.'⁶⁷ Historians studying recent historical develop-

60 Saliba 1976:73f. According to Saliba the anthropological approach embraces '(1) explanation in terms of antecedent event or efficient causes; (2) explanation in terms of mediating factors [... meaning of customs and values in terms of their interrelatedness]; (3) explanation in terms of ends or purposes [... functional studies]; and (4) explanation in terms of general laws or principles [... sees its object within a larger framework, as pertaining to a class]' (101).

61 Saliba 1976:126 ff.

62 With this expression I refer to certain kinds of cultural phenomena that have been subject to renewed interest during the last thirty years. Spiro 1969:208 'symbolic anthropology ... the ostensibly new field of symbols and symbolism.'

63 Spiro 1969, Firth 1973. The term 'symbol' has been in use in other research fields as well of course, e.g. psychology, Freud 1921, philosophy, Cassirer 1973, linguistics, Sapir 1972-79.

64 Turner 1969b:8 'the basic unit or "molecule" of human ritual behavior—which contains both verbal and non-verbal constituents ... is the ritual symbol.'

65 Cf. the definition of 'myth' proposed by Scheid and Svenbro 1994.

66 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7 '... collective ceremony can traditionalize new material as well as perpetuate old traditions. Some of its formal properties mimic its message in this regard.'

67 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8 'In acting, stylization and presentational staging, ritual is attention-commanding.'

ments also realise that invention plays a role in 'mass-producing traditions.' As Hobsbawm concludes, 'traditions' which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.⁶⁸ The essence of 'tradition,' then, is not necessarily age, but the circumstance that the tale (rite, image) is institutionalised, and surrounded by collective care, creating a magnetic centre upon which people spontaneously lavish their emotional and material resources.⁶⁹ Traditions belong to the general category of cultural symbols, they share their properties of being emotionally charged and comprising multiple meanings, which make them particularly flexible instruments of creating culture.⁷⁰ In fact it is especially in times when society is being rapidly transformed that the need is felt for 'invented tradition of a novel type for quite novel purposes.'⁷¹ We have to return to these properties in more detail.

Not only do symbolic tales tend to be enveloped in a 'traditionalising' atmosphere, they are, by definition held in a *concrete form*.⁷² A symbolic tale stages a presentation of concrete personae rather than uttering abstract propositions. This obvious property of symbolical tales is often passed over in analyses of the phenomenon. We have been so familiar with the explanation that the staging of individual fates is due to the 'primitive' nature of myth, that we have overlooked the possibility that it may be an essential requirement of the phenomenon. It seems necessary to examine this concrete or '*presentational*' nature of symbolic tales, as it is labelled by Moore and Myerhoff,⁷³ which is opposed to explicit arguing. The purpose of the 'presentational' quality is to deflect questioning.⁷⁴ We can expect that symbolic tales may appear as tales from the past, generally being enveloped in an aura of *factuality*, presenting facts of history, but also geography, or general 'nature.'

Another aspect of symbolic tales is that they may include an 'exegesis,' explanations of the events presented. These exegesises, however, need not offer the real rea-

68 Hobsbawm 1992:9 Their functions include establishing or symbolising cohesion, establishing or legitimising institutions, socialisation.

69 Hobsbawm 1992 stresses the circumstance that traditional histories are in fact not the events actually recorded, but those which 'have been selected, pictured, popularised and institutionalised by those in function to do so' (13). Giving some examples of the invention of traditions in our modern world he notices '... all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion' (12).

70 Hobsbawm 1992:11 'The crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership ... Their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality.'

71 Hobsbawm 1992:6.

72 Cf. Lévi-Strauss 1977:61 'logic of the concrete.'

73 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:7.

74 Moore and Myerhoff 1977:8 'ritual ... deflects questioning at the time.' Cf. Connerton 1989:102.

sons. We have to realise that the *explanation* ('*motivation*') of a symbolic tale *may be part of the tale*, while the real motives remain hidden. According to Sperber, 'The symbolic character of a motivation is not due to the fact that it applies to a symbol, it is rather the object that becomes symbolic by virtue of the motivation that is applied to it ... motivations establish the truth of a statement not by demonstrating it but by presupposing it.'⁷⁵ The meaning offered, as an exegesis, is in fact not the real one. This suggestion is related to Pierre Bourdieu's notion of '*méconnaissance/misrecognition*,' the fact that the real meaning of symbolic expression is disguised.⁷⁶ In other words, symbolic expression often serves another *aim* than that which it professes to do. The facts of nature or history, even when being the subject of the tale, are not really what is at stake, perhaps not even when they are presented in cosmogonic tales.

Maybe the pervasive criticism and 'correction' of mythical tales in antiquity (e.g. the introduction to the first Homeric hymn to Dionysos or Pindaros' First *Olympian Ode*, Eur. *IA* 794) was a necessary part of the system serving a similar purpose. And while disputing which was the correct version of a story, the critic presupposed the existence of the mythical hero. According to Paul Veyne 'Le mythe était un sujet de réflexions graves et les Grecs n'en avaient pas encore fini avec lui, six siècles après ce mouvement des Sophistes qu'on dit avoir été leur *Aufklärung*. Loin d'être un triomphe de la raison, l'épuration du mythe par le *logos* est un programme très daté, dont l'absurdité surprend ...' (Veyne 1983:13).

Thus far we could summarise the properties of 'symbolic tales' into an abbreviated definition as 'culture-creating tales.' The epithet is of course too general to be very useful, and has to be refined with detailed qualifications. However, with this expression we may avoid the passive connotations of 'traditional' as 'the present generation ruled by the past' as well as 'the present receiving information from the past.' On the contrary, as we have seen, symbolic tales are both highly flexible *tools*, grasped and selectively moulded for strategically shaping concep-

75 Sperber 1975:30f. Cf. '... the motivation of symbols (of which exegesis is a special case) is not metasymbolic, but symbolic (33).' 'Exegesis ... does not constitute interpretation of the symbol, but one of its extensions, and must itself be symbolically interpreted' (48). Cf. Scheid and Svenbro 1994:11, '... le mythe, dans une culture donnée, est une 'proposition' simple ... Et d'exégèses, faut-il ajouter.' Buxton's discussion of the explanations of traditional tales overlooks the problem of pseudo-explanations, the fact that the explanation given does not present the real issue at stake, it only apparently offers some reason (1994:211). Lloyd 1983:217, studying the development of Greek science, argues that science made explicit, what were implicit concerns in traditional thought.

76 Bourdieu 1982:122 '... tout rite tend à consacrer ou à légitimer, c'est à dire à faire méconnaître en tant qu'arbitraire et reconnaître en tant que légitime, naturelle, une limite arbitraire.' Cf. Bourdieu 1992:81.

tions of the present, as well as *dynamic forces* structuring the cultural senses of individuals and audiences.

This latter property I would bring into focus, because I think we are not always aware of the complex workings of our material in its original setting. As I suggested the scepticism about the existence of a category of 'myth' may in part be due to the fact that these tales frequently are described within an entirely intellectual approach. Often symbolic tales are analysed as if they were tales merely *conveying* action patterns or 'classification systems,' this underlying structure being basically a non-affective or non-narrative entity. Proponents of this view seem to assume that symbolic tales are expressions of some language competence, and just another cognitive medium.⁷⁷ Hence the surface tale is dispensed with as less interesting, and with it the rich moulding of the affective reactions in the audience.

I would not deny that symbolic tales do shape the cognitive world of the audience, but we have to be aware of the possibility that these tales do more than just order perception. For this reason the surface of the symbolic tale is not irrelevant to its meaning. It is basically through the details of the telling that different reactions to the tale are roused, and with them collective sentiments of value are created. At this stage already I would suggest that some of the essential workings of 'symbolic tales' are to be found in the interaction between classificatory ordering of perception and the charging with value. The question of the existence of 'myth' seems thus to be more a question of terminology and focus: by labelling a tale as an instance of the 'classification system,' the structure within the tale is equated with the mythical tale as such, and hence it does not differ essentially from ordinary speech. By directing the main focus upon deciphering this structure in the tale, the tale's total presentation of events is given less attention. But it is through the totality of the tale that 'meaning' comes about and cultural elements are charged with value. In particular the tale's performance in a concrete social setting should, when possible, be given proper attention, the details of the telling and reception.

The semiotic approach includes both structural and narrative aspects, and may be more useful as a common denominator for the cultural element of symbolic tales.⁷⁸ Still both structuralist and semiotic approaches may be too intellectual, in that they present their object of study as underlying structures or patterns of thought, without accounting extensively for the affective impact of symbolic tales.

77 Cf. Connerton 1989:104. What is lacking, according to Connerton is the notion of 'the body as a bearer of social meaning' and incorporating practises serving a social mnemonic purpose. Connerton focussing on the importance of 'habit-memory' of bodily processes in the creation of a group's collective sense and action. The notion of 'habitus' in Bourdieu 1977 is fundamental here.

78 Sourvinou-Inwood 1991.

The approach of Walter Burkert and Fritz Graf is primarily directed towards the plot aspect of traditional tales, these being by definition narrative. However, they consider 'myths' not to be identical with the surface tale either, but to be found embedded as plot structure of an elementary schematic nature, 'Aktionsprogramme,' e.g. a 'girl's tragedy,'⁷⁹ the 'transgression, punishment'⁸⁰ scheme, or the New Year's 'dissolution and reunion' plot. In practical analyses, however, they pay attention to the affective impact of particular episodes.⁸¹ What is important is that this approach in its definition seriously focuses on the social context of the 'applied' tale.

Still I doubt whether this approach sufficiently accounts for the elaborated form of traditional tales, their composition as a bounded tale, their often fantastic or 'scandalous' content, which appeals to the imagination and the senses, and structures cultural sentiments.

This point can be illustrated by the following example. If the essence of 'myth' is to be found exclusively in its plot-structure or motifs, how are we then to account for tales which offer similar plot schemes, while on the surface being obviously different? Comparing Euripides' *Bakkhai* and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* Daniel Levine observes 'the common plot involves groups of women in rebellion against the civil authorities ... retreat to a holy mountain ... [they] defeat their primary male antagonist, who himself is dressed as a woman ... and dies a ritual death.'⁸² Levine assumes then that these two dramas 'with their common themes and "women on top" associations, demonstrate an affinity between the genres ...'⁸³ This view precisely misrepresents the distinction between genres and disregards the surface text, which creates completely different meanings. In both dramas women ensnare their male enemy, the first presenting the tragic fate of Pentheus, the second the comic degradation of the Athenian magistrate. Although one of these dramas obviously did not treat traditional material, both were performed at the public and religious celebration of the Dionysia in classical Athens. The theory of an underlying plot structure cannot account for the differences between these two tales, because it does not take into account the 'prescribed' affective reactions in the theatre. The object of these dramas was to rouse vastly

79 Burkert 1979a:7.

80 Graf 1987:54.

81 Burkert 1966; Graf 1979; Bremmer 1984; Versnel 1993b and 1993c.

82 Levine 1987. The tale of the Lemnian women, which in Burkert's interpretation accompanied the new year festival at Lemnos, we may assume, was performed in a serious and solemn version at this festival. However, we may imagine a version like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, (similarly an action of women run wild and getting power over their men) but contrary to the Lemnian version evoking outrageous laughter.

83 Levine 1987:30. He even asks 'Why does no playwright cross the genre boundary?' (36).

different responses in the audience, horror and laughter respectively, the tragic and comic emotions intended within the two distinct performances.

In the case of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* we can readily assume a 'mundus inversus' scheme, the hilarious situation of a world ruled by women. While this plot could have been a seriously subversive utterance of rebellious women, the not so subtle parody of female weaknesses in the surface text excludes this option, while the opposite, a ridiculous 'women-on-top' scenario supporting the *status-quo* is much more plausible. When we take the context of theatrical and social organisation into account, all doubt should disappear. A simple analysis of plot-structure which does not include the social context, nor the fantastic elaboration of the surface texts is bound to fail in discovering the tale's cultural meaning. The same applies to the *Bakkhai*, with its subtle orchestration of the audience's imagination and cultural emotions surrounding the central value of Dionysiac cult. Instead of ridiculing the 'women on top' scenario, the drama's workings result in sacralising this (cultic) world order, that is, *the taboo on male participation*, in the service of the all-powerful god.⁸⁴ These compositional, imaginal and affective aspects we have to include into our analysis of 'symbolic tales.'

Culture and its workings

There are however still other aspects to the problem, the question whether and how we may separate 'symbolic tales' from general 'cultural processes.' This problem guides us to the question how cultural patterns and values are created and maintained. These are of course conveyed in every day communication, through the examples given by others and in the expectations they communicate. But in addition to this 'routine' maintenance of the culturally ordered world most groups are in need of extraordinary means of mobilising common focusing, the festive, non-mundane instruments of culture, not seldom resulting in the creation of anti-order.

This double nature of what is commonly classified as 'symbols' has been analysed by Sherry Ortner. She distinguishes between two kinds of 'key-symbols, summarizing and elaborating' in the following manner: 'Summarizing symbols are primarily objects of attention and cultural respect; they synthesize or "collapse" complex experience, and relate the respondent to the grounds of the system as a whole. They include most importantly sacred symbols in the traditional sense.

84 For a detailed analysis see Bouvrie 1997. A shorter version, with iconography Bouvrie 1998. Konstan 1991 argues for the distinctively Greek nature of Greek myths, maintaining that *Greek* myths cannot be separated from their poetic medium, e.g. tragedy which focuses on emotional and personal content. I am sceptical of this modern conception of tragedy as well as of the notion that the myths of other cultures can be understood without listening to the details of the telling.

Elaborating symbols, on the other hand, are symbols valued for their contribution to the ordering or “sorting out” of experience. Within this are symbols valued primarily for the ordering of conceptual experience, *i.e.* for providing cultural “orientations,” and those valued primarily for the ordering of action, *i.e.* for providing cultural “strategies”: ... ‘Summarizing symbols in general ... operate to compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to “symmarize” them under a unitary form ... Elaborating symbols, on the other hand, work in the opposite direction, providing vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas ... they are essentially analytic. Rarely are theses symbols sacred’⁸⁵ Key symbols are signaled by several ‘indicators:

(1) The natives tell us that x is culturally important,

(2) the natives may seem positively or negatively aroused about x, rather than indifferent,

(3) x comes up in many different contexts. These contexts may be behavioral or systemic: x comes up in many different kinds of action situation or conversation or x comes up in many different symbolic domains (myth, ritual, art, formal rhetoric, etc.),

(4) there is greater cultural elaboration surrounding x, *e.g.* elaboration of vocabulary, or elaboration of details of x’s nature, compared with similar phenomena in the culture, and

(5) there are greater cultural restrictions surrounding x, either in sheer number of rules, or severity of sanctions regarding its misuses.⁸⁶

Both the summarising symbols, which synthesise complex experience and elaborating symbols which are analytic involve feelings, the first by mobilising commitment around complex ideas, the other by sorting feelings and ideas. Symbols, and culture in general are seen as creating ‘orientations,’ *i.e. cognitive and affective* categories; and ‘strategies,’ *i.e.* programs for orderly social action in relations to culturally defined goals’ (emphasis added).⁸⁷

Outside the routine maintenance of social norms, and in addition to every speech act, which may enforce the rules of society, there are the special occasions of ‘symbolic speech,’ that is, tales that are surrounded with special attention and which may be designed in order to evoke some culturally prescribed sentiments in

85 Ortner 1973:1340. Key symbols are public and not necessarily conscious, they point to special cultural interests. Key symbols of the summarizing kind are those that demand special commitment, while elaborating symbols serve to direct thought and action with their formal organizational role.

86 Ortner 1973:1339 ‘... there may be more indicators even than these of the key status of a symbol in a culture, but any of these should be enough to point even the most insensitive fieldworker in the right direction.’

87 Ortner 1973:1340.

the minds of the listeners. These tales belong to the wider category of 'public events,' in Don Handelman's terms, celebrations which are set apart, 'framed,' from every-day life and acknowledged as such by the community.⁸⁸ This author focuses on the way these special events are created and the manner in which they are structured. 'Public events' (or ritualized action) are of central importance to a group, and different types of social organisation tend to create certain types of rituals, '... different logics of design in the constitution of public events index social orders that themselves are organized in radically different ways.'⁸⁹ Each of the phenomena identified by Handelman as 'public events' follows a special sequence or script with 'formalization of space, time, and behaviour that distinguishes these [public occasions] from the living of mundane life.'⁹⁰

Victor Turner has contributed to the study of symbolism by pointing to the evocative character of symbols. He recognises as a general feature of symbolic phenomena that they mobilise the senses, imagination and emotions of the participants. In many rituals this is achieved by a wide-spread use of music, song, dancing, visual attributes, special costumes and masques, and the use of alcohol, incense or other stimulants. During the celebrations he has studied, there is a similarly wide-spread tendency to present 'sacra,' that is, dramas or tales which refer to some basic human experiences, such as the relations between family members, sex, birth and death. During the event the senses and emotions of the participants are aroused to a higher level of sensitivity, while at the same time messages about the basic norms of society are transmitted. The complex stimulation affects the audience's emotional or 'orectic' sensibility, while the implicitly transmitted messages direct themselves at the 'normative' receptivity of the participants. Turner's main point here is that the 'exotic' aspects of symbolic phenomena are in fact a fundamentally necessary requirement for creating culture, 'Ritual, scholars are coming to see, is precisely a mechanism that periodically converts the obligatory into the desirable.'⁹¹ According to Victor and Edith Turner the 'sacra' enacted in a religious celebration not unexpectedly often present the cultural heroes *transgressing* conventional morality, thereby no doubt eliciting reactions of abhorrence in the audience to the ('scandalous'!) tale. In a ludic phase, on the other hand, there

88 Handelman 1990.

89 Handelman 1990:7.

90 Handelman 1990:11. Celebrations which mirror the ideal world are found in powerful bureaucratic states, those that shape and model the participants are more common among tribal people, and those that re-present, that is 'work on comparison and contrast in relation to social realities,' belong to traditional hierarchic societies. Here we typically find liminal phenomena, as indeterminacy and inversion, the temporally acceptance of anti-structure. Handelman, 1990:66, cf. *idem* 1982.

91 Turner 1967:especially 27-47, 29f.; Cf. Turner 1969a, 1969b, 1974, 1992.

are activities, which turn the world upside-down and play with the elements of culture, producing a '*jocund festivity*' in order to revitalise the community, or—in times of crisis—to heal a social breach.⁹² There is thus no question that cultural symbols merely mirror the hierarchies and ideal order of the world. Instead, in celebrations, this world is broken up and transformed in order to achieve definite affective reactions in the participants. As Barbara Babcock argues, societies need both order and disorder (1978b). I will presently return to this aspect.

We are familiar with the fact that in initiation ceremonies the accompanying tale commonly tells of the horrible fate of some young (male) heroes and their wanderings outside the civilised world (Bremmer, Calame, Sourvinou-Inwood),⁹³ or, as Bruce Lincoln suggests interpreting female transition rites (the Persephone myth in the *Homeric hymn to Demeter* included), the tale evokes the cosmic significance of the (female) hero/initiand.⁹⁴ Through the evocative force of the tale the participants in the rite were transformed in their experience of themselves. And as Lincoln underscores, the essential workings of the ritual telling is the transformation of the people involved.⁹⁵

Lincoln has studied the creative and mobilising aspects of symbolic tales, a category which he terms 'discourse,' together with phenomena as ritual and classification. Countering the wide-spread idea that myths are conservative vehicles of traditional values, or oppressive to the powerless, he states that there is nothing intrinsically reactionary in myth (Lincoln 1983:81). He demonstrates through several studies that 'discourse can also serve members of subordinate classes to demystify, delegitimate, and deconstruct the established norms, institutions and discourses that play a role in constructing their subordination.'⁹⁶ Still Lincoln observes a general tendency to create myths referring to the remote past as reactionary instruments of power, while myths viewing the future as a construction of an ideal world, as is observed in millenary movements. He presents the schematic equation (1983:84):

$$\textit{'Cosmogonia:Escatologia} = \textit{Reazione:Rivoluzione.}'$$

92 Turner and Turner 1982; Cf. Turner 1982 and Turner 1999:577. For an interesting application of Turner's models within a classical context see Strauss 1985.

93 Bremmer 1978:2, Calame 1983; 1990, Sourvinou-Inwood 1979.

94 Lincoln 1981.

95 Lincoln, 1981:34 '... using symbolic action, transforming the individuals involved, endowing mundane existence with some grander meaning, and reaffirming the abstract values of society at large.' Cf. 'I view ritual as a coherent set of symbolic actions that has a real, transformative, effect on the individuals and social groups' (6).

96 Lincoln 1989:5. Cf. Lincoln 1985.

Above all stressing the imperative and dynamic force of the phenomenon Lincoln warns against conceiving of myths as just 'reflections' of or 'comments' upon society (1983:79).

Within cultural performance studies stressing the importance of the socially created context, it is generally assumed that the social interaction between performers and audiences has the capacity to transform, not simply reflect social life. Felicia Hughes-Freeland studying modern performative genres focuses on 'the active roles which militate against the notion of the audience as passive recipients of a clear communication.' In the terms of Edward Schieffelin 'performance deals with actions more than text: with habits of the body more than with the structures of symbols, with illocutory rather than propositional force, with the social construction of reality rather than its representation,'⁹⁷

Studies of the 'performance' of symbolic expression suggests that this modelling of emotions is an important part of the events. The (unconsciously) orchestrated sentiments in cultural performances are studied in macro-celebrations as the present-day Olympic games by John MacAloon.⁹⁸ These special occasions clearly demonstrate that the modulation of sentiments is an important aspect of these collective events.⁹⁹

Handelman is especially interested in the way these public performances are structured, that is, the 'orchestration of experience and affect, the moods, states, emotions and sentiments of participants and on-lookers.'¹⁰⁰ This aspect of public events has also been given special attention by Bruce Kapferer, who points to the fact that there may be sequences of expected sentiments which are evoked in rituals where the powers of the universe are dramatised, and the techniques by which the audiences are guided through a programme of reactions, may vary from serious to hilarious. We have thus reason to be attentive to this modulation of cultural sentiments. The dynamic character of certain ritual phenomena is brought out in a number of studies, e.g. the transformation of the participants through special 'symbolic types,' in particular the ritual clown. According to Kapferer '... the analysis of ritual as form, particularly in relation to how it effects important transformations of the contexts of meaning and action cannot be satisfactorily achieved without considering the process of its performance. ... [Ritual] is not simply the presentation of symbolic objects and actions in highly stereotyped and redundant

97 Hughes-Freeland 1998:15, Schieffelin 1998:194. Cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990:59-69.

98 MacAloon 1984. He analyses the different moods dominating the various genres of rite, game, festival, and spectacle: solemnity, joy, fun, awe, and so forth.

99 Cf. Fernandez 1974:123 '... society is not only a system of interlocking categories, but an ebb and flow of emotion.'

100 Handelman 1990:1f.

form, the dramatic revelation of myth, the expression of cultural ideas and principles, the marking out of some inexorable cultural logic and so on. Ritual moves participants, it organises their emotions and experience, it questions those taken-for-granted elements of cultural life and holds them up for inspection. We have often been reduced to the consideration of ritual as conforming to a set of semantic rules, or as being organised in accordance with linguistic principles. This may be so, but ritual derives its efficacy and power from its performance and it is in its performance that its work of transformation fails or succeeds.¹⁰¹

The capacity of symbols to mobilise people into collective action is due to their complex affective-cognitive nature. Lincoln in fact supports the general view that 'society is constructed from nothing so much as from sentiments.'¹⁰² Symbolic phenomena, then, do not only involve the conceptual ordering of the participants' world, their cognitive function, a primary aim is to mould the emotional reactions of single participants. Abner Cohen even maintains that symbolic action is essential to the preservation of the self. 'The contractual element is subversive of selfhood, the symbolic element is recreative of selfhood. It is in the symbolic act that we continually create and recreate our selfhood, the totality of our person' (123 emphasis in the original).¹⁰³ Following Turner he argues that 'the norms, values, principles and rules [of society] are abstract and remote and their mere perception by the person is not sufficient to induce him to action. It is only when a person is emotionally agitated by the sensory pole of the symbol that he will be moved by action' (121). Clifford Geertz reminds us of the fact that 'not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artefacts.'¹⁰⁴

Inversion

The cultural device that is especially responsible for moulding the participants' sentiments in symbolic processes is the *inversion* of the normal order.¹⁰⁵ We are so familiar with this phenomenon that we might lose out of sight that the most important aspect is its emotional quality.

101 Kapferer 1984b:6. Cf. Kapferer 1984a, Handelman and Kapferer 1980.

102 Lincoln 1989:20. Turner 1969b:12 analysing the operational dimension of symbols, what participants do with them, includes their 'affective quality ..., whether they are "aggressive," "sad," "joyful," "penitent," "derisive," and so forth, in terms of the given culture's standardized interpretations of these expressive acts.'

103 Cohen 1977, cf. Pinxten 1991.

104 Geertz 1973:81.

105 Babcock 1978b. Objectively and from an intellectual point of view this phenomenon is often labelled *incongruence*.

Inversions are part of the festive and ritual practices as opposed to normal behaviour. According to Barbara Babcock, the tendency to dissolve the normal systems of signification and to create a state of disorder answers a fundamental human urge and belongs to the realm of 'ritual' as contrasted with 'normal and ceremonial discourse'.¹⁰⁶ She observes that in normal (and ceremonial) communication there is complementarity between signifier and signified. 'In contrast, ritual communication involves both an extremely economical and extremely inflated relation of signifiers to signifieds.' During these practices man may create phenomena with disproportionate relationships between signifier and of signified, resulting in a surplus of signifiers or a multitude of signifieds. In the first case, veritable 'fireworks' are created, 'as pure pattern and pure possibility, ... a symbol of revolution, it is itself a revolution in, a suspension of serious and normal modes of signification' (*loc. cit.*).¹⁰⁷ In contrast to these carnivalesque results, the second alternative creates 'the multi-signified of serious ritual communication' (*loc. cit.*).

As Babcock observes 'Ritual events as well as distinct phases or sequences within a given event are initially marked or framed by a bracketing of ordinary signification. In one of two ways—by literally denying and stripping away or by multiplying to the point of indeterminate nonsense—we suspend customary meanings: by fasting or feasting, by sexual abstinence or sexual licence, by nakedness or by costumes of motley, by immobility or excessive movement, by seclusion or public display, by silence or noise.' (1978b:297).

'While bracketing through excess is more frequently the means of framing ludic or antistructural rituals or ritual phases, and denial more generally indicative of the serious and the structural, such is not always the case: priests wear costumes as well as clowns. Whatever the initial frame, ritual sequences that are essentially serious and iterative of structure are ordering and orderly. This means that the ma-

106 'A surplus of signifiers, then, creates a self-transgressive discourse which mocks and subverts the monological arrogance of "official" systems of signification. The bantering *anti*-signified of carnivalesque discourse is an insult both to the complementarity of ordinary speech and to the multi-signified of serious ritual communication. It is also a statement in praise of and as a demonstration of the creative potential of human signification as opposed to its instrumental and representative use' (Babcock 1978b:296)

107 'By playing with the ways in which words and objects and actions signify in normal and ceremonial discourse, discourse by means of a surplus of signifiers paradoxically both questions and reaffirms social, cultural, and cosmological orders of things. While a superfluity of signifiers is predominant and self-evident in ludic or carnivalesque ritual, I would suggest that *all* rituals involve a dialogue or alternation between these two modes of signification—multi-signifier and multi-signified—both of which differ from our daily, ordinary use of signs. In contrast to the complementarity between signifier and signified characteristic of normal discourse, ritual communication involves *both* an extremely economical *and* extremely inflated relation of signifiers to signifieds' (*loc. cit.*).

jority of signs—verbal and nonverbal—are polysemic or multisignified and that they are hierarchically arranged, the dominant or central symbols marked by extreme multivocality (297) .

In contrast, those rituals or phases of ritual which focus on the ambiguous and inhibited aspects of the social order, or which invert, contradict, or otherwise challenge structure, are disorderly and disordering. Antistructural sequences are likely to be ungrammatical and indeterminate, and this indeterminacy is expressed primarily, though not exclusively, through an excess of “floating signifiers” (297). In ritual, society “takes cognizance of itself” and communicates its major classifications and categories both through ordering them and through disordering them—by overdetermining *and* by rendering indeterminate customary processes of significations. Ritual, then, involves not only the enactment and transmission of the ultimate sacred propositions, but also the exposure of the ultimately significant to the devastating play of *nonsense*. This paradox inherent in ritual is significant.’ (298).

What I think particularly interesting is the fact that inversion can be created with different means and varying effects. The comic topsy-turvy world of fantasy is a well known device of rousing laughter, it is at the core of carnival and has burst forth spontaneously in many times and places. I would call attention to the way inversion may operate along a tragic as well as a comic axis.

It may be less generally accepted that the world of disaster may generate inversions of a gloomy kind. In fact tales of the terrible chaos, which once upon a time disrupted the order of the world, bringing barbarian invasions, revolution of the lower classes, parricide and sterility, are not uncommon in oriental texts, as has been demonstrated by S. Luria, who labels them tales of ‘die trübe Zeit.’ However, often these tales are contrasted by visions of a paradise-like condition, when the poor rise to power and the earth provides peace and abundance, ‘eine selige Glückzeit.’¹⁰⁸ Tales of the age of Kronos or Saturnus, as Hendrik Versnel has argued, confront a time of chaos and disaster with a paradise-like age of peace and happiness.¹⁰⁹ No doubt such tales belong to this category of gloom *vs.* peace-and-abundance tales. Even if the tale offers an outrageous violation of norms, it may be beneficent to the audience and result in the creation of culture.¹¹⁰

108 Luria 1929. Cf. Auffarth 1991.

109 Versnel 1993b and 1993c respectively.

110 This effect could be compared with the emotions noticed by Nancy Munn in her detailed analysis of the emotional effects of symbolic expression upon the participants in initiation rite and myth (Munn 1969:199). ‘Thus the body destruction experiences connected with the individual and pre-social forms of power are converted into experiences of bodily well-being and strength through the operation of the ritual upon the myth.’

In a somewhat different way Greek tragedy seems to offer this kind of tale, staging a primordial time when the world was newly ordered. In the course of the mythical events this fundamental order is disrupted, to the 'shock and horror' of the audience. The Attic theatrical performances with their impressive lyrical and imaginative poetry evoked the metaphysical world of living gods and heroes and worked upon the cultural reflexes of the participants. This precludes any notion of a quasi-philosophic drama, as is so often assumed, when terms as 'discourse,' 'didactic function' and so forth are applied.¹¹¹

The foundation of these notions of tragic drama may be a result of projection on the part of the investigator, who 'observes' his own intellectual processes in the object. Jean-Pierre Vernant argues that the tragic protagonists were perceived by the audience as persons stemming from a distant age, while the chorus voiced the attitudes of contemporary Athens.¹¹² Vernant's basic notion of Attic tragedy assumes a 'dual relationship with myth. In the tragic conflict, the hero, the king, and the tyrant certainly still appear committed to the heroic and mythical tradition, but the solution to the drama escapes them. It is never provided by the hero on his own; it always expresses the triumph of the collective values imposed by the new democratic city-state.'¹¹³ N.T. Croally argues for tragedy's 'didactic function.' Following Vernant the author maintains 'In the democracy, the widening of the franchise was more extreme, the right to speak openly more acceptable, and the politicization of discourse more complete. Tragedy was such a discourse.'¹¹⁴ This last sentence is no more than an *a priori* statement. Similarly Christian Meier assumes a political forum of debate, offering rhetorical questions rather than arguments: 'Fragen über Fragen mußten sich auf tun, die man kaum vor der Volksversammlung erörtern konnte ... Konnte da die Tragödie einspringen? ... Brauchten sie [die Griechen] die Tragödie vielleicht auch, um Distanz zum Alltag zu gewinnen, Ausgleich, Klarheit—und ein Offenhalten der Grundlagen ihres Lebens: brauchten sie sie zu deren Weiterbildung?'¹¹⁵

In this question of interpretation we as scholars, belonging to a generation which saw the fundamental challenging of academic and political authority, are

111 E.g. Vernant in Vernant and Vidal Naquet 1986:22 'A travers le jeu des dialogues, la confrontation des protagonistes avec le chœur, les renversements de situation au fil du drame, le héros légendaire, chanté en gloire par l'épopée, devient sur la scène du théâtre l'objet d'un débat. Quand le héros est mis en question devant le public, c'est l'homme grec qui, en ce v^e siècle athénien, dans et par le spectacle tragique, se découvre lui-même problématique; cf. 'le "discours ambigu" d'Ajax' (13).

112 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1972: 'Préface,' cf. 11-17.

113 Vernant and Vidal-Naquet *loc. cit.*

114 Croally 1994:11, 2.

115 Meier 1988:9f.

most easily in danger of projecting our own habits of exploring, challenging, questioning, and probing, into our object of study, expecting the Attic dramatists to do the same. In addition we seriously neglect the fundamental difference between this ritual theatre and our own, 'aesthetic,' theatre as I would call it, which we are completely free to visit.¹¹⁶ Here, in spite of our involvement in the action we essentially keep an aesthetic distance to the events presented and as an audience we are expected to perceive a conscious message conveyed in the drama. Our attitude towards art in general is emphatically individualistic and our age of rapid change one of self-examination and self-reflexivity. According to David Napier 'we live in a constant state of self-definition, in which reflection, for all that this word means, is not only a desirable state but a moral imperative' (emphasis in the original).¹¹⁷

Interpretations of Greek tragedy often assume that this mythical story telling was *exploring* our inner ambiguities and paradoxes. However, interpreting tragic drama as the presentation of 'moral ambiguities,'¹¹⁸ reveals an intellectual and aesthetic or 'flat' understanding of tragedy, like observing a document, a piece of paper and discounting the specific tragic effect in its original audience. The (unquestioned) notion that tragedy stages ambiguity stems from Vernant too, and is found in e.g. the work of Simon Goldhill. Referring to the *Bakkhai* Goldhill observes 'Dionysos' sphere would seem to encompass precisely the sense of paradox The tragic texts seem designed to leave an audience with a question (as often

116 Schechner 1983:137 (Schechner's distinction between ritual and theatre corresponds to my ritual theatre vs. aesthetic theatre):

'EFFICACY <	> ENTERTAINMENT
Ritual	Theatre
results	fun
links to an absent Other	only for those here
abolishes time	symbolic time emphasizes now
brings the Other here	audience is the Other
performer possessed, in trance	performer knows what he is doing
audience participates	audience watches
audience believes	audience appreciates
criticism is forbidden	criticism is encouraged
collective creativity	individual creativity'

Furthermore Schechner characterises our modern theatre as a performance in which psychological means are prominent and authenticity (in the sense of ritual efficacy) is lacking, 'This use of psychology is a reflection of our preoccupation with the individual In a society as large and wealthy as ours only aesthetic theatre is possible' (136), in contrast to among other theatre forms classical Athenian drama (127, 139). Schieffelin 1998:202f. maintains that popular assumptions about the nature of the relationship between theatre audience and performers are ethnocentric and should not be extended to cultural performances in other cultures.

117 Napier 1992:32. Cf. the extremely individualistic and intellectualistic approach by Croally 1994.

118 Cf. Buxton 1994:197 '... in tragedy expression is given to the rich moral ambiguities latent in the bare narratives about some of the heroes.'

as not about the legitimation of social positions). It is here in the potential *undermining of a secure and stable sense of norm ...* that the most unsettling thrust of tragedy may be located' (emphasis in the original).¹¹⁹

Again our perception of the artist as somebody radically separated from society and 'declaring his exclusion from the masses' is a *modern* notion. According to Napier our expectations of the artist are shaped by 'the [modern] desire for individual discovery and the romantic passion for the socially disenfranchised.'¹²⁰ So perhaps we should allow the *ancient* dramatists to cooperate with their community in creating the basic values of their society.

We should beware of interpreting this ritual theatre in individualistic psychological terms too. When Greek culture does present 'the other' this is not in opposition to 'the self,' that is 'me,' but to 'us, our normal world order, our valuable way of being and doing,' the cultural dimension of the self. Nor is the intended emotional effect of tragedy to be identified with the individual's reaction, which varied according to the various personalities in the audience, as Richard Buxton asserts. Speaking about myths in general, he states '... the chief and in my view unsurmountable difficulty for unitarians, especially those panpsychists who deal in universal symbols, lies in the extraordinary plurality of tones on offer in Greek mythology No explanation of a single emotional effect or a single psychological function can hope to cover the fantastic aesthetic variety of these tales.'¹²¹

While I would not deny the empirical fact of individual diversity and the plurality of personal responses, I maintain that it was an important aspect of tragic 'myths' that they *prescribed* the specifically stylised tragic sentiments, just as comedy *prescribed* reactions of laughter. These assumptions are not mysterious or reductionist. Folk-tales and other traditional genres work upon different sentiments, and we have to take these intended reactions into account because they are part of the meaning of the tale. According to Hassan El-Shamy '... the affective components of lore must be examined first as learned "sentiments"' before seeking explanations in biologically based "emotions" (e.g. psychoanalytic interpretations)' (El-Shamy 1997: 233).

Old comedy, being an instance of the modulation of the audience's reactions, staged the liberation from hierarchies and social constraints, from disturbing elements and anxieties, in a joyous celebration of vitality, incorporated in the invincible hero, marriage (*gamos*), feasting and plenty (*komos*).

We are familiar with this idea that comedy aimed at provoking various kinds of laughter. In the same way tragedy aimed at provoking tragic shock and horror as

119 Goldhill 1990:128.

120 Napier 1992:31, 21.

121 Buxton 1994:216f.

well as 'katharsis.' This ritual theatre, I suggest, was not just *staging* 'myths,' (cf. Vernant's apodictic 'les tragédies, bien entendu, ne sont pas des mythes'¹²²) it *was* a 'myth,' that is, a living symbolic performance of traditional as well as ludic tales involving the participants in a collective experience. It drew them into its Dionysiac trance modulating their reactions through tragic shock and comic jubilation, while in the course of satyr drama slightly detaching the audience from the mythical world.¹²³ As such it modulated the audience's distance towards the dramatic events. Ritual theatre may flow between close experience of the metaphysical powers as being present and consciousness of a fictitious world.¹²⁴

It is meaningful to think of tragic and comic theatre in ancient Athens as presenting traditional or ludic personae on stage and engaging the audience in horrible or ridiculous events, which, according to Aristotle eventually lead to 'katharsis,' a release of a definite kind. As I have argued elsewhere, tragic drama did not present problems to reflect upon or philosophical theses. It invaded the cultural reflexes of the audience with the horrifying violation (the tragic 'inversion') of the normal order of social institutions, sometimes followed by their 'restoration.' By presenting these violations of the world order the theatre performance engaged the audience in revitalising their cultural sentiments to these institutions.¹²⁵ The *Helene* e.g. does not stage the heroine's reflection or suffering, but the objective violation of the institution of marriage, in particular the respectability and fidelity of the wife, the union of the marital couple, and the installation in their proper *oikos*. All these elements are initially threatened or violated. In the course of the action all violations are dissolved and the drama ends in a joyous 'restoration' of the world order.¹²⁶ The *Trojan Women* does not make a statement about the horrors of war and the suffering of civilians. The drama invaded the audience with a horrible inversion of the normal order, when the 'warrior' is present defending wife and children.

I will maintain, then, that Greek tragedy was 'mythical and symbolic' in a complex sense. Firstly it staged versions of the traditional tales. And secondly it created a tragic process guiding the audience through a horrific violation of their cultural senses of normality, validity and value, operating in a symbolic process. In other celebrations no doubt different reactions were expected, and the imagination and emotions were moulded in other ways. We are familiar with the 'iambic,' that is,

122 'Tragedies are not, of course, myths,' Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988:7.

123 Bouvrie 1993a; cf. Aronen 1992.

124 See the discussion of Yoruba tradition in Nigeria by Götrick 1993, 'Edungun apidan—rituell teater.'

125 Bouvrie 1988, 1990a, 1993b.

126 Bouvrie 1990a, 289-313; cf. Bouvrie 1991.

contemptive mood of lyrical forms, a genre embedded in sympotic culture, the 'encomic' mood of victory odes, and other examples may be found.

Literature and 'myth'

With these examples I have addressed the distinction that is usually made between 'myth' and 'literature,' with the connotations 'primitive' and 'sophisticated,' a distinction, I think, convenient to modern developments rather than accounting for the Ancient world or other pre-modern societies. Our notion of literature does influence our perception of myth in general, and this is why frequently a boundary is established between myth, that is, oral telling and 'literature.'¹²⁷ Vernant, while drawing the distinction between oral and literary myth, still stresses the social role of these literary works.¹²⁸

One necessary condition for separating between primitive and advanced literary forms is the idea that 'primitive' societies do not foster outstanding artists, a view I think is fundamentally biased (*Cf. BMCR* review of Calame by Michael Clarke, 18.12.2000). Another underlying idea is the notion of the poet dissenting with the traditional outlook of his society, a view I already have called into question. We should accept the idea that the great works of ancient literature may be 'mythical' in the sense of working through symbolic processes in their community.

Another distinction is seen between genuine and not-genuine religious texts. 'Real' myths are coached in a religious atmosphere. According to Veyne 'la mythologie grecque, dont la liaison avec la religion était des plus lâches, n'a pas été au fond autre chose qu'un genre littéraire très populaire.'¹²⁹ Of course here modern notions of genuine religious expression influence our view. However we should not separate genres according to what we would think fit in a religious service and what not. The range of such expressions and sentiments may be much wider in other societies than our own. This is not to deny the differences noticed in epigraphical and literary expressions of the divine, as has been noticed by Harvey Yunis and Jon Mikalson.¹³⁰ While written texts in Greek tradition may fall short of what we consider to be religious expression (the existence of liturgic texts, other than hymns and prayers, is doubtful), or lack the tone of epigraphical sources, they may still be symbolic in nature.

¹²⁷ An example of this perception is 'the literary reworkings of myth,' Zaidman and Pantel 1992:143.

¹²⁸ Vernant 1990:24f. 'L'activité littéraire, qui prolongue et modifie, par le recours à l'écriture, une tradition très ancienne de poésie orale, occupe dans la vie social et spirituelle de la Grèce une place centrale. Il ne s'agit pas d'un simple divertissement personnel, d'un luxe réservé à une élite savante, mais d'une véritable institution faisant office de mémoire social, d'un instrument de conservation et de communication du savoir dont le rôle est décisif.'

¹²⁹ Veyne 1983:28.

¹³⁰ Yunis 1988; Mikalson 1991.

André Lardinois envisages ‘the possibility that our cherished distinction between “myth” and “logos,” which is now often interpreted historically, is in fact a reflection of a generic distinction between narrative poetry, like epics or tragedy, and a didactic tradition based on speeches and reason.’¹³¹ What Lardinois has noticed, is the difference between ‘myths’ as didactic and as a non-didactic (traditional) tales. In Lardinois’ analysis ‘real’(?) myth does not operate in a didactic explicit mode, it just tells the story which mirrors a world, in the hero learns through suffering.¹³²

Lardinois’ observations are interesting since they demonstrate a growing awareness of the fleeting nature of the boundary between ‘myth’ (traditional tale) and ‘logos,’ of the implicit meanings of ‘symbolic tales,’ as well as of the complexity of the genres under discussion. Now we should beware of uncritically assuming that the workings reside in the way the hero learns from suffering, which I think is a modern protestant idea, or that the audience learned something of the kind. The focusing on suffering seems to me to reflect our modern Western notion of the individual’s responsibility. Such a view of the nature of ‘mythical’ tales situates the audience again in a position of reflection, at a modern and aesthetic distance from the events presented, and passively receiving the poet’s message. We should instead consider the symbolic aspect of the epic work as a constant crossing of cultural boundaries, thereby conveying its implicit message. The *Odyssey* guided its audience through a disrupted world of the *oikos*, gradually restoring this world to its proper order.¹³³

The *Iliad*, in my view, offers a similar development as the *Odyssey*, revitalising the notions of heroic existence as opposed to the non-heroic, in a way dealing with the conditions of survival for the *polis*.¹³⁴ Starting with a disruption of the proper honour of ‘the ideal warrior,’ in the violent quarrel between the central hero and his opponent which demolishes his status, the fundamental elements and values of

131 ‘Myth versus Logos. A Generic contest between Homer and Hesiod?’ (Lardinois 1996:11). Lardinois suggests that ‘Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are essentially myths with a lot of speeches; Hesiod’s *Works and Days* is a speech with some myths ... this generic difference comprises a different outlook on life, which prefigures the later opposition between “myth” and “logos.” In Hesiod, myths are used as *paradeigmata* to further the argument ...’ while ‘there are didactic speeches in Homer, for example Phoenix’s speech in Book Nine of the *Iliad*, ... but speeches are shown to be ineffective.’

132 ‘In Homer, on the other hand, myth is the main course and neither the *Iliad* nor the *Odyssey* is ostensibly didactic ... they rather contemplate the world, which is viewed as essentially tragic ... The epic hero, like his tragic counterpart, does not learn from speeches, but from suffering and it is suffering (*παθήματα*) which are recorded in the myth’ (Lardinois 1996:11).

133 Cf. Vidal-Naquet’s analysis of the *Odyssey* (Vidal-Naquet 1983a = 1986a).

134 As Marilyn Arthur has shown the *Iliad* crosses the boundaries between male vs. female worlds (Arthur 1981).

this central symbol in Greek society are charged with value. While the plot carries the audience through the concrete fates of Akhilleus, (Diomedes), and Hektor, the heroes become interchangeable in the symbolic progress of the tale violating and restoring this symbol of the 'superior warrior.' By withdrawing from battle his value as a warrior is emphasised, the situation in a sense bringing the war to a 'standstill,' creating an ebb and flow between the armies without any decisive result. It is this to and fro between success and defeat which highlights the value of the (absent) warrior (Diomedes seeming to constitute a pervasive positive background).

By returning and gaining renewed recognition in positive action the hero confirms his status. This status as paramount warrior being connected with the condition of an early death is opposed to the status of inferior warriors, who will die in old age. In other sequences the emphasis is laid upon other aspects of 'the ideal warrior,' his function as a defender of the polis being visualised in the person of Hektor. The deadly earnest of this task is underscored by the foreshadowing of the hero's as well as the city's doom. It is not by accident that Akhilleus' and Hektor's death are conditioned upon each other. At the dramatic level their fates are interconnected, at the symbolic level the two concrete manifestations of the warrior symbol are fused. While the Akhaian hero does not die himself within the scope of the tale, 'the ideal warrior' does in the person of Hektor, attracting all the praise and lamenting he deserves as a heroic defender of the city.

The *Iliad* does not teach in a conscious reflective way, the audience was provoked in its cultural reflexes, it first experienced an outrageous 'inversion' of the world order in the symbol of 'the superior warrior.' Subsequently it witnessed the abundant honour and *kleos* lavished on the 'hero' after his death. While at its dramatic level perhaps offering a tragic (in the sense of undeserved) suffering, at the symbolic level the *Iliad* parades a violation and the positive 'restoration' of the warrior's value. Just as the *Odyssey* offers the violation of heroic existence at the *oikos* (at Ithaka) and the various defective worlds (in Odysseus' narrative) leading to the 'restoration' of the *oikos* and the world order, to the initial horror and subsequent comforting of the audience.¹³⁵

Here the issue of the nature of oral vs. written literature may be raised once more. However, whether a tale was conceived in an oral or literate mode does not seem to be the crucial distinction within our context, and the question should therefore be reformulated, I think, into emphasising the reception of the tale. In this respect we should keep in mind Burkert's concept of 'eine angewandte Erzählung.' Not the mode of production of the tale is decisive, but the way it is received as an important, exciting, or horrifying story, drawing the audience towards its magnetic center.

135 Vidal-Naquet 1983a = 1986a).

Traditional tales vs. non-traditional tales

In this discussion too I would consider briefly the Greek idealistic-romantic novel, a genre belonging definitely to a literary age (although it may have been read aloud to the audience of a household).¹³⁶ While these tales do not present traditional mythical heroes, there may still be reasons to ask how the Greek novels relate to the categories of 'myth' and symbolic tale? The lack of traditional material is a feature the novel shares with New comedy. Still both genres present a fascination with a fundamental Greek preoccupation: chastity. This virtue, which first and foremost applies to females, is in some of the novels a virtue of the male hero as well, and it seems to me that this fascination amounts to what we may call a cultural or key symbol. This value complex guarantees the citizen-body in maintaining its exclusive privileges within the confines of the family and citizen group. The pervasive fascination with chastity, which is typical of all these novels, creates the obstacles and dénouements of the tale. The norm of marital fidelity is central even when it seems to be broken.

In Khariton's novel the heroine cannot remain faithful to her husband, while she is captured and sold to another husband. Still it is significant that Kallirhoe bears a child which is without any doubt her original husband's, and in this way the tale is signalling the crucial function of fidelity, being the clue to identifying fatherhood.

The fascination with the motif of marital fidelity and female chastity, which is so dominant in the novel, is also important in tragic drama, as well as in New comedy. In New comedy chastity is challenged but restored, when the heroine is recognized and rescued as a born citizen. In tragic as well as comic plots the legitimacy of offspring may be at stake, (e.g. in Euripides' *Ion*). Tragedy stages males while comedy generally highlights females. As I have argued elsewhere, these central aspects of the *oikos* institution were the symbols revitalized in the ritual theatre, and I would suggest, this was the case in the novel too, although in a different manner.¹³⁷ Unlike Ben Edwin Perry, who interprets the novel as an escapist genre,¹³⁸ I will suggest that the Hellenistic novel served a symbolic aim in uniting the Hellenic communities in their dispersed existence throughout a foreign world. The genre as a whole may tell us something about the audience's need for preserving their Hellenic identity through a narrative abundant in signs of Hellenism, literature, religion and so forth. Far from being just a form of entertainment the novel emphatically brings the Hellenic world to the forefront, and draws its audience to-

¹³⁶ Hägg 1994.

¹³⁷ Cf. Bouvrie 1988, 1990a 1991, 1993b.

¹³⁸ Perry 1967:36ff.

wards the perennial fascination of the legitimacy of offspring. The peculiar detail of male chastity and fidelity, as demonstrated in the figure of Theagenes (in Heliodoros' novel), in particular, but also in Khariton's Khaireas, may be interpreted as part of the general fascination with boundary-building. Female chastity created the boundary between legitimate offspring and bastards in the *oikos*, as well as between citizens and not-citizens in the polis, guaranteeing the social order within the Hellenic world. The male-chastity-motif may be due to similar symbolic pressure. A phantasy of males remaining faithful to their (faithful) Hellenic wives (or a pseudo-Hellenic ideal-world wife in the person of Kharikleia), demarcates Greek from non-Greek, preserving the purity of the group, its 'chastity' and cultural 'endogamy'.¹³⁹ While these assumptions must remain speculative, I would suggest that the occurrence of 'symbolic tales' may be widespread and manifest themselves at unexpected moments.

As has been argued earlier, traditional tales (myth) and symbolic phenomena are not isomorphic categories. Traditional tales may cease to be symbolic, to draw the audience towards their magnetic centre, and new, fictitious, tales may become charged with symbolic power. Nor are symbolic tales always neatly separable from discursive speech. This may be the reason why Calame wishes to include 'the argumentative and rational functions' in his definition of 'myth,' while, likewise, Lincoln includes argumentative elements in his definition of 'discourse' (closely related to symbolic phenomena). In the wide sense ascribed to it by Lincoln, 'discourse is not only an instrument of persuasion, operating along rational (or pseudo-rational) and moral (or pseudo-moral) lines, but it is also an instrument of sentiment evocation.'¹⁴⁰ This argumentative activity may however rest on a non-argued for basis, some premiss which is taken for granted, hence his qualification 'pseudo-rational,' a phenomenon I would identify as symbolic workings.

I suspect that symbolic 'pressure' can emerge in the course of argumentative discourse, as traditional tales can be employed in arguing and moralising, that is, in a rational mode of thinking. We should not thus distinguish 'myth' (in the sense of specific tales) and history, according to our criteria of miraculous/factual or irrational/rational, (and improper, 'scandalous'/proper). This distinction is not the important and interesting one. What is really at stake, is the nature of symbolic workings in contrast to arguing and moralising, that is with its appeal to conscious judgement and decision making.

We may then conceive of the appearance and workings of symbolism in a complex and fluid manner, as is the case with Herodotean historiography, where the

139 Bouvrie 1992.

140 Calame 1996b, Lincoln 1989:8; cf. '... it is through ... ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation that discourse holds the capacity to shape and reshape society' (9).

symbolic ordering of the world along an axis of Greek normality/otherness imperceptibly protrudes in a rational account of foreign cultures.¹⁴¹ The rational account of historical events, conditions and customs reaches at times a symbolic cadence, gathering the Hellenic audience in a synchronised vibration of cultural awe when Herodotos' reports of foreign peoples amount to transgressions across the Hellenic sense of naturalness and honour.

One may wonder in what way this symbolic pressure on 'otherness' differs from that emerging in the mythical presentation of Aiskhylos' *Prometheus*. In this drama the world is mapped out in the descriptions of Io's wanderings in an orbit around Argos, the normally ordered world whence Io has departed. In Prometheus' prophecy Io's wanderings operate like a radar mapping on its screen all disturbances and abnormalities, regions which do not know agriculture or *xenia*, nor marriage, that is, representing sub-human forms of life. Scyths do not know how to plow, Khalybes and Amazons violate other forms of normal life. In the second drama, it seems from the fragments, Herakles' exploits were foretold in a similar way presenting, however, the super-human forms of existence found among the righteous Gabioi, law-abiding Scythians, Hesperids, and god-fearing and long-living Hyperboreans.¹⁴²

Not only traditional and non-traditional, (non-mythical) tales then may manifest symbolic pressure, explicitly rational arguments may do so as well, as the studies of Herodotean historiography have demonstrated. And, it seems, so may even philosophic discourse. We may *e.g.* wonder whether the philosophical work of Aristotle manifests symbolic elements, when, in his account of the Spartan state's degeneration (Arist. *Pol.* 2, 1269B 12ff.), he implies the evil effects of female economic rights for the development of the polis. This record shows features of the 'myth of matriarchy,' tales which tell of the disastrous effects of women's rule in primordial time.¹⁴³ This kind of myths justifies the subordination of women ever after.¹⁴⁴ An example is the myth of Kekrops (which is found in Augustinus *De civitate Dei* 8:9) telling how the Athenians restrained their women after the whole population had voted for a patron deity and women being in the majority chose Athena, thereby causing Poseidon to flood the territory of Attika.

141 Hartog 1980; Rosellini and Saïd 1978. Vidal-Naquet signals a similar tendency in Diodoros Siculus (Vidal-Naquet 1991:xxii).

142 Bouvrie 1993b:213f.; Bouvrie 1996:1.

143 Bouvrie 1990b.

144 Zeitlin 1978 = 1984, citing Bamberger 1974.

How should we distinguish 'mythos' from logos?

Thus far we have seen that symbolic tales or ritualised action represent a complex and complicated object of study, entailing the structuring in conceptual systems, and the collective modulation of sentiments in symbolic performances. 'Mythos' and 'logos' may run parallel or be intertwined, and the fact that symbolic phenomena are concrete, evocative, imaginative, and affective suggests that they involve other functions and faculties than conscious cognition and decision-making.

However, we are still left with the question of the precise relationship between symbolic and rational thinking and the question whether symbolic tales in fact constitute a separate category of thought. Of course the answer will depend on what we are thinking of when we apply the expression 'pensée mythique, pensiero mitico, mythisches Denken, mythical thinking.'

The question of distinguishing 'mythos' from 'logos' or symbolic expression from rational thought should then be addressed in a more systematic way. In order to handle this problem we have to establish a distinction between the social as well as the biological aspects of the phenomena we are discussing, their why and how. The distinction between symbolic (mythical) and rational thought may at first be considered as a social question, the way we apprehend and act within our social world. Next it is a question of what human faculties we draw upon, the psychological question. I will first address the question of the social aspects of the 'mythos'—'logos' distinction, with an obvious point stated by the anthropologist Richard Shweder: 'Whereas all peoples assert beliefs, true and false, ordinary language and thought aims to do more than merely report and represent the causal structure of reality.'¹⁴⁵ Besides rationality, which has irrationality as its counterpart, a failure to apply the standards that have been set for rational reasoning, there is always this third category, which Shweder labels the non-rational.¹⁴⁶ Pointing to the inevitably arbitrariness of culture Shweder stresses the fundamental fact that people create 'frames, paradigms, constitutive presuppositions,' that is 'statement[s] about the world whose validity can be neither confirmed nor disconfirmed.'¹⁴⁷ In spite of this fact, we as humans are incessantly driven to 'prove' the improvable, to anchor our culturally created view of the world. The rules of a culture may be explicit, but this is not necessarily so.¹⁴⁸ The more fundamental the rules, the more they are implicit.¹⁴⁹ These patterns and rules are not unlike our grammatical knowledge, and are part of our 'tacit knowledge.'¹⁵⁰ The rational and descriptive is thus complemented

145 Shweder 1984a:12.

146 Shweder 1984b:38ff. 'where the canons of rationality, validity, truth, and efficiency are simply beside the point— irrelevant ... there is something more to thinking than reason and evidence—culture, the arbitrary, the symbolic, the expressive, the semiotic— ... a realm where man is free to create his own distinctive symbolic universe.'

147 Shweder 1984b:40.

by the non-rational normative meanings of culture, which are 'shared, collective, supra-individual' and organized.¹⁵¹ These shared meanings are often 'disguised in symbolic forms.'¹⁵² We should then distinguish the rational, instrumental, argumentative (and innumerable other kinds of) thinking from the non-rational, cultural creation of shared meanings.

These patterns, however, should not be understood as just offering a conceptualising of the world.¹⁵³ When studying 'symbolic tales,' then, we should not only investigate the way they structure the world in classificatory systems but also their possible directive and evocative aspects. Ioan Lewis warns against exclusively conceiving of symbols as a sign language.¹⁵⁴ In symbolic activity not only are the actions of the participants stylised, there are prescribed states of feeling as well, modelled into sentiments according to culturally valid patterns. Relating this to the subcategory of 'symbolic tale,' we may assume that the tone that is evoked in the tale should be given proper attention. This aspect might as well account for the distinction between *e.g.* folk-tale and 'myth' within our cultural area, the one inducing hopeful belief in chance, a lucky fate, the other, based upon the serious be-

148 LeVine 1984:76 '[people] take for granted as self-evident responses to what is and what ought to be ... what informants find difficult to verbalize is more important, fundamental in the cultural organization of ideas than what they can verbalize.'

149 'Much of culture is not recoverable through straitforward ethnographic interviewing' (Levine 1984:77).

150 Sperber 1975:x.

151 LeVine 1984:72 'The "shreds and patches" concept of culture has simply not survived the test of intensive field investigation, because the ethnographer ... discovers the orderliness not only in their communicative conventions but in their version of "common sense," the framework of ideas from which they view, and act upon, the world. The framework ... is an organized set of contexts from which customary beliefs and practices derive their meaning.'

152 LeVine, 1984:77.

153 Cultural meaning systems, according to Roy D'Andrade (1984:89), are more than 'purely representational in character,' these meaning systems 'have directive and evocative as well as representational functions,' that is, they direct our actions and evoke cultural feelings. *Cf.* 'Meanings represent the world, create cultural entities, direct one to do certain things, and evoke certain feelings. These four functions of meaning—the *representational*, the *constructive*, the *directive*, and the *evocative*—are differentially elaborated in particular meaning systems, but are always present to some degree in any system' (96). *Cf.* '... ideas, feelings, and intentions are all activated by symbols and are thus part of the meaning of symbols. In general, there are a variety of lines of evidence that indicate that any human system of meaning is likely to involve affect' (99).

154 Lewis 1977:1f. 'that symbols possess a cognitive aspect which is legitimately explored in this fashion [Lévi-Strauss] is not in question. But the danger is that, infatuated with this style of analysis, we should forget that the ultimate force of symbols depends at least as much on their power to stir the emotions, moving men to action and reaction.' *Cf.* 'This excessive emphasis on thinking and cognitive processes neglects, or seriously underestimates, the powerful emotional charge which all effective symbols carry ... the study of symbols must include the study of sentiments' (Preface:vii).

lief in inexorable doom.¹⁵⁵ Still we have to notice what audience is addressed. So traditional images, known as *mundus inversus* images, staging 'lamb eats wolf,' 'stag hunts hunter,' 'ox slaughters butcher,' 'peasant riding-king walking,' 'wife scourges husband' *etc.*, have served as an expression of revolt among the poor, while in another age and milieu they undermined the subversive effect, rousing laughter at the idea of revolt.¹⁵⁶

Anthropologists studying the telling or staging of tales in their living context are in a fortunate position, because they can still observe the affective tone of the telling or dramatising situation, as well as the level of authority assigned to the tale. This may often result in the mapping out of a wide range of genres. An example is Gary Gossen's study of the Chamula tradition in Chiapas, Mexico, a people speaking Tzotzil, a Maya language. This culture which ranges its speech performances along a scale running from 'cold' to 'hot' tales, corresponding to the cosmic hierarchy centering around the sun (!), acknowledges different kinds of verbal behaviour, which are increasingly stylized. 'Competent language use, like the sun, is characterized by measure, controlled patterns of intensity.'¹⁵⁷

The symbolically ordered world is not anything given. Our cultural meaning systems need repair, an activity that is incessantly going on everywhere. Unlike statements about the world which it may be sufficient to make once, symbolic messages need to be revived precisely because they do not just present information, but revive the sentiments of the participants.¹⁵⁸ What is fundamental about 'symbolic tales' is not their meaning, being either true or false, but their effect, in Bourdieu's terms their 'efficacité.' He would not speak of 'meaning' in the sense of

155 Peradotto 1973:57.

156 Kunzle 1978.

157 Gossen 1989:391. Gossen offers a very interesting catalogue of recognized genres of speech, which distinguishes, for example, 'Recent words: true recent narrative' and 'Recent words: frivolous language'. The 'true recent narrative' genre is performed by 'speakers [who] are excited' (400) using redundancy and 'speech for people whose hearts are heated.' 'What "true recent narrative" accomplishes with prose accounts of true breaches of the social order, "frivolous language" accomplishes with laughter. The genre consists of five subgenres All of these express or refer to ambiguous or deviant behavior, and elicit laughter from participants and onlookers. Laughter appears to underline the norm by placing the deviant or ambiguous item of behavior in sharp relief against the norm' (404f.). The performance of 'Ancient words: true ancient narrative' shares many properties with the 'true recent narrative' genre, the important difference being the temporal dimension, while ancient words refer to the first three creations, before the present fourth in Chamula cosmology. This genre, referring to the crucial, basic knowledge, is characterised by greater stylistic redundancy and metaphorical restatement of an idea (408), and it is near the 'Ancient words: prayer' genre, which carries still greater metaphorical heat (409).

158 D'Andrade 1984:105 notes 'In most human groups the communication of messages, both framed [telling what the original message is about] and unframed, is so frequent that it suggests the hypothesis that meaning systems need messages to keep themselves alive. Without relatively constant activation perhaps meaning systems disintegrate.'

some cognitive content, but their 'effect' in transforming people's notions of themselves and the world.¹⁵⁹ Here we may identify the 'aim' of symbolic tales.

Furthermore there are the hidden effects of symbols, diverting the attention away from their essence.¹⁶⁰ And the way symbolic meaning systems also tend to offer concrete tales thereby shielding themselves from being discussed overtly and exposed to attack.¹⁶¹ A basic property of symbolic processes is this dissimulation of the fact that they are symbolic in the sense of carrying cultural—that is arbitrary—meaning.

We may here think of Bourdieu's notion of 'doxa,' the undiscussed. It is precisely because of this dissimulation that the category of 'myth' is such an elusive entity. Myths cease to work at the moment they are recognised. In Bourdieu's terms, the most fundamental 'ideas' in society are those, which are withdrawn from open discourse and exchange of (orthodox and heterodox) opinions.¹⁶² Belonging to the opaque realm of the 'undiscussed (undisputed)' or 'doxa,' fundamental cultural truths are removed from the vision of the members of society, and relegated to a status of 'nature.' However, what I think is most important in his model of the workings of culture, is not the realm of the undiscussed, implicit meanings, values, or structures, but the borderline between the realms of 'opinion' and the 'undiscussed (undisputed).' It is this borderline, which in reality manifests itself in a number of (unconscious) practices, which merits our attention. And it is here that the proper arena for 'symbolic phenomena' is to be found, filling a difficult task of transmitting the culturally valued, and at the same time dissimulating that it is this they are doing.

159 Speaking about initiation rites Bourdieu (1982:124) underscores '... l'efficacité symbolique est tout à fait réelle en ce qu'elle transforme tout à fait la personne consacrée.' Cf. 'La croyance de tous, qui préexiste le rituel, est la condition de l'efficacité du rituel' (133).

160 Bourdieu analyses male initiation, contrary to other analyses not by emphasising the passage itself, separating the initiated from the uninitiated, the real focus of interest for analysis is the unnoticed borderline dividing those who are eligible to being initiated from those (females) who are not. 'L'effet majeure du rite est celui qui passe le plus complètement inaperçu' (1982:122). In this way the ritual diverts the attention from the heart of the matter to some unimportant element, the passage, thereby consecrating or naturalising an arbitrary distinction between (socially) male and female.

161 This is what Moore and Myerhoff refer to, when explaining the 'presentational' quality of symbolic phenomena (1977:8).

162 Bourdieu 1977:168. The term 'idea' is here misleading, because Bourdieu himself is eager to stress that one of the fundamental vehicles for cultural patterns is in fact the body with its senses and sentiments, carrying our 'habitus.'

How does 'mythical' vs. logical thought operate?

The question whether symbolic tales in fact exist must be followed into the field of psychology. The social processes are after all created by individual minds and therefore there is a continuum between the collective shaping of culture and individual psyches.¹⁶³ After our discussion on the 'why' of symbolic phenomena in the social world, we have to address the 'how,' the recurring question whether there does exist something like a distinction between 'mythical thought, la pensée mythique, mythisches Denken, il pensiero mitico' on the one hand, and rational thinking on the other. In some quarters it is answered in the affirmative, but sometimes it is firmly denied,¹⁶⁴ while others ignore the issue. This question has already been reformulated into the statement that 'myth' is not to be conceived of as the opposite of 'logos' as irrationality, because it does not handle falsifiable propositions. As a non-rational ordering of the world, symbolic phenomena fulfil the complex task of creating culture.¹⁶⁵ The problem then arises, what are in fact 'symbolic phenomena' in psychological terms?

While we are well acquainted with the functioning of conscious and logical reasoning, most of us have only vague knowledge of the symbolic mode of ordering the world. Cultural phenomena are mostly studied as social entities, while their possible psychological properties have not been subjected to an equal amount of investigation.¹⁶⁶ While I do not pretend to have an expert's command of neurobiology, I think we have to consider the data available from the field of psychology, which are sufficiently mapped out to be incorporated in the study of symbolic phenomena.

What comes first to mind are the 'primary processes' as studied by Sigmund Freud, a category of reactions to the world, which is opposed to 'secondary processes.'¹⁶⁷ Freud associated primary processes mainly with the workings of dreams, in that they operate subconsciously through images instead of conscious verbal thought, that is, secondary processes. Freud's theory of the workings of dreams, then, stresses first and foremost their imaginative nature, their manifestation as images. It includes their tendency to collapse images from different moments in

163 See Lewis 1977.

164 E.g. Buxton 1994:5 'Nor, emphatically, do I wish to suggest that myths are generated by "the imagination," in the sense of a particular mental faculty, perhaps even to be differentiated from "reason": the existence of such a faculty is quite chimerical.' Detienne and Calame have been mentioned earlier.

165 Shweder, 1984b: 38.

166 Victor Turner has devoted considerable attention to the psychological dimensions of cultural symbols, at first provisionally in his studies referred to earlier, later he incorporated psychological results more systematically into his work (Turner 1985). Inspired by: d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979. Turner 1977.

167 Freud 1921:435ff. 'Der Primär- und der Sekundärvorgang.'

time thus wiping out temporal and causal relationships (*'condensation'*), furthermore the property of transferring the energy of emotionally charged impressions in real experience to insignificant elements in the dream image (*'displacement'* [of emotional energy]), thus disguising the source of anxiety, and finally the frequent operation of *'inversion'*, the exchange of image-elements according to principles of similarity and contrast.

Freud's focus of interest was of course to account for the operation of the dynamic subconscious, the psyche's urge to shield our real but socially unacceptable impulses from becoming manifest to ourselves and disturbing us in our sleep. The images thus masking our real self he labelled 'symbols,' which he in the course of time came to identify as masks for our erotic impulses, a content he did not identify in the earliest phase of his thinking on dream processes. This narrowing down of what initially was conceived of as a wide range of dream motives has created an unfortunate barrier of scepticism around the theory. It has been criticised by Charles Rycroft, who thinks anthropologists still should pay attention to the very abstract notions which have been formulated about the workings of dreams.¹⁶⁸ In an attempt at modifying the theory of dreams to a theory of culture Percy Cohen suggests that cultural symbolisations (e.g. tales) may draw on materials which are stored in the dynamic unconscious (i.e. forbidden impulses and dreams).¹⁶⁹ This suggestion still departs from the assumption that 'primary processes' manifest themselves in dreams only, and that their function characteristically is that of disguising erotic impulses. These assumptions, according to Rycroft, are too narrow, and we should then return to Freud's earlier concept of symbols as representations of 'everything that comprises man's biological destiny.'¹⁷⁰

There is another aspect to this problem. We have been told that the Freudian dynamic unconscious mind is a mechanism which works in order to shield our unacceptable drives against society's censure. However, if the theory of symbolic/dream/primary processes maintains that these processes are operating in order to disguise our hidden drives when confronted with censure, *the same theory does not seem to explain where this inner censure stems from*, it is simply taken for granted.¹⁷¹

168 Rycroft 1977.

169 Cohen 1980:65f. 'in societies in which people are closer to nature and to natural processes ... there will be a greater and more obvious tendency for certain processes of cultural symbolisation to call upon the resources of the dynamic unconscious.'

170 Rycroft 1977:139.

171 Freud 1921:99ff. where the author represents the nature of 'die Zensur', that is, our internalised inhibitions, offering as his 'argument' only the analogy of a situation when somebody is dissimulating ('sich entstellt') out of fear of a more powerful person and the analogy of writers fearing political censure. No psychological mechanisms are invoked in order to demonstrate the *establishment* of censure.

Can it be that the norms and rules of society have been installed in our mind through the very same processes? Instead of taking for granted that censure simply is operating, we may assume that it has been established in our psyche through the same complicated processes as our defense mechanisms, creating the ‘summarising and elaborating’ symbols, with their *culturally shaped sentiments* of what is valuable, normal or honourable and their counterparts.

There are reasons to accept such an assumption. Not only does Rycroft claim that ‘symbolism [in the Freudian sense of ‘primary processes’] is a general capacity of the mind,’¹⁷² there are other scholars who argue in the same direction. Dan Sperber studying the relationship between our rational and our symbolic processing capacities, defends the latter against a pervasive suspicion of primitivity.¹⁷³ As a matter of fact Freud, even though he demonstrates deep fascination with dream processes, consistently refers to these human capacities as something phylogenetically as well as ontogenetically primordial and primitive, prior to conscious, verbal reasoning manifesting itself in the secondary processes.¹⁷⁴ There is, according to Sperber, no reason to assume this priority (and hence primitivity) of our imaginative faculty, which Rycroft describes as a capacity ‘which can be used both by the discursive, syntactical, rational form of thinking characteristic of waking, intellectual activity (“secondary process thinking” in psychoanalytical terminology) and by the non-discursive, condensive, affective form of thinking characteristic of dreaming, imagining, joking and creating (“primary process thinking” in psychoanalytical terminology) and by recognising that these two types of thinking are not necessarily opposed to one another, as most formulations of psychoanalytical theory imply, but can work in harness.’¹⁷⁵ It is obvious that the psychic mechanisms at work are extremely complicated, and that we cannot separate the functioning of one half of our brain temporally from the other half. It seems, then, that Freud’s ‘primary processes’ do not only manifest themselves as dreams, they are embedded in various psychic activities.

This is confirmed by a psychological monograph on the phenomenon of ‘intuition’ by Tony Bastick who presents results from psychophysiological experiments

172 Rycroft 1977:139.

173 Sperber 1980:29.

174 Freud 1921:446. We could argue that the theory of primary and secondary processes and their internal hierarchy could be called a modern myth itself, in that it ‘describes’ the ‘nature’ of the human mind, while implicitly confirming a culturally created ordering of mental activities into more and less civilised (corresponding to the widespread dichotomy of ‘male’ and ‘female’ psychic make-up, logical reasoning seen as a masculine prerogative, and unordered and affective thinking as female).

175 Rycroft 1977:139.

which suggest that part of our answers may be found here.¹⁷⁶ The author examines a great number of studies on this human faculty and concludes that it can be contrasted with logical/analytic reasoning by a number of properties. Bastick defends this cognitive faculty of 'intuition' (which he recognises as Freud's 'primary processes'¹⁷⁷ and the functions of the right cerebral hemisphere¹⁷⁸) against prejudices of primitivity, and summarises the properties of this ability, which not only is not primitive, but can be developed as an eminently human faculty of problem solving at the heart of scientific creativity.¹⁷⁹

'The intuitive process is preconscious, but analytic thought is entirely a conscious discipline ... Analytic thought is a linear step-by-step often slow process whereas intuitive thought is sudden and depends on parallel processing of a global field of knowledge, whereas analytic thought only compares two elements at a time ...'¹⁸⁰ Intuition is thus activated when our logic reasoning falls short of solving complex problems. It is at the roots of our conceptualising and creative faculties, the eureka experience of mathematicians and inventors, while operating by similarity and contrast. 'Intuition depends on physiological functions, *e.g.* understanding by feeling and instinct, and most importantly empathy However, pure analytic thought, pure reason, or pure intellect in contrast to intuition is considered to be entirely independent of physiology, *e.g.* machine intelligence. It is considered in this investigation, however, that what generally is called analytic thought is, like all thought, interwoven with our intuitive processes and cannot exist independently.'¹⁸¹ 'Unlike the analytic process of reasoning, intuition is not logical but categorizes on common associated feelings rather than common logical properties ...'¹⁸²

Among the other basic properties of the intuitive process are: preverbal ordering of the world, emotional involvement ('analytic thought is "cold" and emotion-free'), dependent on past experiences and the present situation of the intuiter,

176 Bastick 1982:2 'Intuition is a powerful human faculty, perhaps the most universal natural ability we possess.' In Ch. 1 Bastick reviews the scientific literature of the last 75 years on the subject.

177 Bastick 1982:143, 320, *cf.* 355.

178 Bastick 1982:188, '... the left cerebral hemisphere as linear, time-oriented, rational, analytic, and verbal, with the right hemisphere as non-linear, lateral-thinking, intuitive, artistic, and creative.'

179 Bastick 1982:310.

180 Bastick 1982:51. In the middle ages the distinction between the two modes of cognition were acknowledged as 'ratio' and 'intellectus.' The famous mathematician Henri Poincaré contrasts intuition with logical thought and notes the insufficiency of the latter (Bastick 52). 'We believe that in our reasonings we do no longer appeal to intuition, the philosophers will tell us this is an illusion. Pure logic could never lead us to anything but tautologies; it could create nothing new ... it is by logic that we prove. It is by intuition that we discover' (Poincaré, cited by Bastick 2).

181 Bastick 1982:52

182 Bastick 1982:52.

(‘analytic thought is considered independent of personal experience’), and empathy, kinaesthetic or other, an understanding by feeling.¹⁸³

The fact that our intuitive-creative capacity is something relatively unknown and misunderstood,¹⁸⁴ may be due to the very condition that its paths are withdrawn from verbal conscious reasoning, it represents an ordering and patterning along principles of similarity and contrast, an essential mechanism being the affective charges in concepts which serve as retrieving devices. This evocative process enables us to solve problems (e.g. recognising faces) that are far too complicated for logic-analytical reasoning, and it seems that it serves as the privileged instrument of creativity as well.

Culture being first and foremost something which is ingrained in our senses and nerves appeals to this imaginative-affective ordering faculty when categorising and creating boundaries and contrasts. It would not surprise us then that the cultural process seems to appeal to the same human faculty when it comes to creating shared meanings. Sperber argues that the very richness of responses to a given stimulus causes individual evocations to be idiosyncratic, unless they are restricted into a shared common symbolism during socialisation, an elimination of individual evocation when members of a group learn to prefer the culturally correct evocations, especially in ‘prescribed cultural contexts.’¹⁸⁵ This synchronisation of evocations seems to be the province of ‘symbolic’ tales, ritual and iconography (‘symbolic tales’ being here a shorthand for all sorts of ‘traditional,’ that is, culture-creating tales, drama, jokes and riddles), which intuitively create order without explicitly stating its principles, precisely in order to withdraw them from critical non-affective reasoning, which cannot provide the matrices of culture.¹⁸⁶

Culture then, being a non-rational process, has recourse to the creative ordering abilities of the human mind, the intuitive-primary processes being responsible for our symbolic understanding and ordering of the world. Symbolic workings

183 Tony Bastick, 1982:51.

184 Tony Bastick, 1982:1f., ‘Insight or intuition is relevant to all fields of study and all walks of life. It is a universal experience, little understood but treasured and sought after by all. The intuitions of great men, the “Eureka” experiences that have pushed forward the frontiers of knowledge, that have produced technologies moulding civilization But there has been little investigation into intuition. There seems to have been a spiritual mystique surrounding this invaluable faculty.’

185 Sperber 1980:35 denies that symbolism should be described as a ‘language,’ because its rules are too multifarious to respond to anything like a grammar (34). However in so far as symbolism is something operating in a collective in the sense of shared meanings, it works in the same way as language. ‘Symbolic representation does not demonstrate the truth but presupposes it,’ it is opposed to encyclopedic knowledge. Symbolic knowledge is not empirically verifiable, and immune to falsification. Symbolism is independent of verbalisation, but dependent on conceptualisation and evocation.

186 E.g. d’Aquili and Laughlin 1979.

would thus seem to involve the creation of collective images charged with specific affective qualities. They may explain why there is a remarkable tendency among many groups to couch culturally meaningful messages in a concrete form. This may account for the fact that cultural patterns often are considered to be 'tacit' knowledge, as are the rules of our grammar. In these imaginative expressions causal-temporal ordering seems to be less essential than dimensions of similarity and contrast. We may likewise understand the widespread occurrence of contrastive images and inversions as a major function of intuitive-primary process ordering and disordering. And in particular we may accept the affective qualities of these expressions as something especially apt at creating the boundaries and values of culture.

First conclusions on the definition of 'symbolic tales'

While we may not be able to draw an absolute borderline between 'mythos' and 'logos' in either social or psychological terms, we should at least be entitled to use the distinction analytically. We may separate intuitive-creative thinking as the instrument which is dominant in symbolic processes, as opposed to logical-analytic thinking for instrumental activities. We may sort symbolic expressions whose primary function is to attract audiences towards a magnetic centre ('summarizing symbols') and those which create cultural patterns and order experience or action ('elaborating symbols', in Sherry Ortner's terms), from speech which primarily serves empirical and practical purposes. Intuitive-creative processing is fundamentally imaginative-affective, and phenomena which create culture are operating through affectively charged imagery. It seems that there is a fleeting boundary between the realms of 'mythos' and 'logos.' However, as we have seen, the creation of culture is a process which takes place in darkness, a hidden persuasion that seeks to dissimulate its paths. The process will try to hide the spaces where the cultural, arbitrary symbols of 'naturalness and normality' are being created and modelled.

The boundary between 'mythos' and 'logos,' then, is to be studied in the area of tales which are accepted by a group (carrying authority and an aura of truth or a special fascination). The boundary runs between (symbolic) tales presenting a message which is to be intuited with the imagination, and which rouses cultural sentiments without being perceived as 'mere arbitrary'; and discursive speech, which offers propositions (orders, wishes and so forth) and arguments. It is by mobilising sentiments around specific culturally charged symbols, images or tales, a specific kind of fascination, instead of coolly reporting, describing the world, that the 'symbolic process' functions.

In creating symbols we subconsciously create magnetic fields, charged with meaning and value, which are grasped by a community (small or large), images which draw us towards their magnetic centre, evoking sentiments, that is, cultur-

ally orchestrated reactions of different nature, a feeling of what is 'honourable' or, on the contrary, abnormal, either abhorrence at what is shocking or laughter at the absurd, a scale ranging from sacred to sacrilegious, through honourable and dishonourable to natural and unnatural. These implicit boundaries of the normal, 'natural' and honourable are essentially affective in nature, and they may be created not by arguing, but by presentations which respect these boundaries or transgress them, by images evoking the ideal world, but more effectively by images which invert that world, either in a revolting or in a ridiculous manner.¹⁸⁷ These shared sentiments of consent or of revolt or derision, shared with a community are at the core of symbolic phenomena.

There is another aspect to this issue. It seems that the criticism of myth was not a phase in the development of Greek culture. When, as Veyne observes,¹⁸⁸ the Greeks did not stop, century after century, purifying their myths, this may mean that criticism was essential to the dynamics of mythical story telling. Traditional tales were to be summoned in highly varying performances and they had to embody a great variety of modes and moods. As Yunis, Mikalson and others have pointed out, the gods of cult differed markedly from the gods of tragic drama.¹⁸⁹ No doubt the workings of tragedy demanded tales with violent disturbing actions, just as the workings of other genres operated in other keys. Isokrates refers to 'the heinous acts performed in other(!) cities (ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις πόλεσι), murder of brothers and fathers and guest-friends, slaughtering of mothers and incestuous relationships resulting in children begotten with mothers, the devouring of children contrived by their closest kin, cases of exposure, drowning, blinding and a host of similar atrocities, of which there is never any lack in the traditional yearly theatre performances' (Isoc. *Panath.* 121). The evocation of moods and motives is due to the fact that symbolic phenomena do not exclusively map the world in categories and conceptual schemata.¹⁹⁰ They stimulate cultural sentiments in order to provoke, rouse laughter, or fulfill various cultural needs, in short, create specific kinds of fascination, which are essential to their meaning and which we are to incorporate into our analysis.

It is evident that tales which have once filled a role as 'culture-creating (symbolic) tale' may be told in new ages and environments. In order to account for the passage of specific (traditional) tales from the social use ('Anwendung') in one

187 For the way ambiguous ('either or') or ambivalent ('both') images may generate energy and the feeling of dynamic potency, see Green 1997.

188 Veyne 1983:13.

189 See references above.

190 Vernant 1990:25f. '... ce rôle de miroir renvoyant au groupe humain sa propre image, lui permettant de se saisir dans sa dépendance à l'égard du sacré, de se définir face aux Immortels ...' (emphasis added).

community to another, which does not share the meaning/value systems of the former group, we have to remind ourselves of the fact that the symbolic quality is not anything inherent in the tale, but arises from the interaction between the community's cultural ordering and valorisation and the elements of the tale. While the same material is carried on in a new group or an altered age, the affective and cultural meanings have disappeared with the old audience, leaving a different effect upon the new one. In order to grasp this transference of the tale's substance to a new context with loss of cultural meaning, I would propose to apply the distinction between 'hot' and 'cold' 'myths.'

Addressing once more the problem signalled by Calame, 'il n'y a pas d'essence ni du mythe, ni de la mythologie,' we may attempt at defining, if not 'myth,' at least something we could agree upon to call 'symbolic tale.' The every-day term 'myth' which we arbitrarily, intuitively, *a priori*, apply to the corpus of stories that we for some centuries have agreed upon calling so, is of course a charged term. It conveys the misleading connotation of 'untruth,' quite to the contrary of what 'symbolic tales' amount to among 'natives.'

Still, there were other paths to explore. I have suggested that the broader category of 'symbolic phenomena' includes narratives, which we may call 'symbolic tales,' by a definition that is operational in that it comprises narratives, allusions and images. What I would propose then is to identify and define these tales, not from their semantic or structural aspects, nor from their narrative nature, nor their genre properties,¹⁹¹ but from their ability to create culture. Since culture is basically something ingrained in our senses and feelings,¹⁹² these tales will mobilise our cultural imagination and sensibility, evoking images and feelings of what is natural and normal, honourable, right, desirable, understandable and their contraries: unnatural and abnormal, shameful, wrong, abhorrent, and absurd. These sentiments are necessarily tied to concrete entities, imaginable situations, spatial dimensions, which in addition demand continually to be renewed.¹⁹³ Avoiding terms as (mythical) 'thinking,' 'messages,' 'language' and cognate expressions,¹⁹⁴ we should devise a scholarly terminology which conveys the connotations I have suggested, the imaginative and evocative aspects of the 'symbolic.' Expressions as

191 Calame 1988:9 '... pas plus que sur les éléments sémantiques susceptibles de définir un mythe, sur la forme littéraire qui pourrait le désigner l'accord n'a pas pu se faire.'

192 Geertz 1975.

193 Cf. 'habitus', Bourdieu 1977; 'habit-memory', Connerton 1989. See also Bouvrie 1995.

194 Keesing 1991:376f. draws attention to the difference between symbolists and cognitivists, in that the latter view their activity as scientific whereas the former are interpretive, the cognitive approach studying 'the pool of common-sense knowledge, and understandings of the community and encoded in its language.' However, when focusing on language, what cognitivism gains in scientificity, it loses in understanding the imaginary and affective qualities of culture.

'evocative' are useful since it conveys both the idea of images and of sentiments, and the same is true for 'symbol,' although the term has been appropriated and unacceptably narrowed down in Freudian vocabulary. A corollary of the approach suggested is that we cannot discard the concrete text/image, in Reuben Brower's words, 'there are no myths, only versions ... only texts for interpretation, whether the text is written or oral, a piece of behavior ... a drawing or painting ...'¹⁹⁵ The same plot, I assume, can be put to contrary effect through the sentiments it seeks to rouse in different versions. A study of their cultural meaning has to take into account the prescribed sentiments of the performance.

We may then develop our definition:

A 'symbolic tale' presents

—'summarizing' or 'elaborating' expressions,

which *imply* the 'truth' instead of stating it or arguing for it, providing

—'explanations' which are *pseudo-explanations* because fundamental premisses may be suppressed and their missing masqued, in short,

—a tale which aims at *achieving effect* instead of presenting an explicit proposition, not because some power instance is manipulating the unaware, but because these non-rational workings are inherent in the process of culture. In fact both powerful and powerless may be unaware of what is going on, exchanging a tale that has an altogether other effect than the message it professes to deliver.

A 'symbolic tale' is

— a tale, which is enveloped in an *aura of factuality*, accepted by an group, attracting a group to a magnetic centre and *mobilising towards some core values* (summarising symbols) or sorting out conceptual experience and *construing conceptions of the world, charging them with value* (elaborating symbols).

—'Symbolic tales' arise not from the lack of ways of thinking alternatively, but because this is the only way of creating unfalsifiable truth, that is, having an effect upon the audience, *effecting subconscious conceptions and motivations* (sentiments of identity, cultural boundaries, honour, shame, duties etc.).

—'Symbolic tales' are nothing less than verbal magic, created by the dominance of the *right hemisphere processes*, our imaginative, emotional, ordering faculty, non-verbal in principle and based on similarity and contrast, as opposed to the non-emotional linear/temporal/causal dimensions of the left hemisphere or secondary processes.

195 Brower 1971:155.

If 'symbolic tales' are verbal artefacts, they are fed with this imaginative, condensating, evocative force, and if, on the surface they pretend to offer an account of time and place, or cause, this is only the surface, the concrete, imaginary tale, while underneath cultural values are at stake. This surface is presented, not because people cannot reflect rationally, but in order to discourage reflection, because this might induce people to doubt or to reject the 'truth.' 'Symbolic tales' cannot therefore be identified with the bare pattern of plot, abstracted from its surface tale with all its emotional effects. Masking the arbitrariness of cultural systems of a particular power system, they may create indisputable truths, as opposed to truths that are arrived at through discussion and argument. Symbolism handles the unarguable, just as we cannot argue for 'what is the true language' or 'what is the true way of living.' Language and culture are beyond the true/false dichotomy and out of reach from empirical verification.

Symbolism structures everyday experience, but just as there are 'special occasions,' celebrations, which are set apart from the everyday business of instrumental activity, there are 'special tales,' separated from rational discursive speech, engaging, stimulating, mobilising towards a collective focus. They partake in the indispensable 'social work' in the process of creating new communities and maintaining them, as well as in demolishing old ones.

'Symbolic tales' are disguised as tales with a linear movement, and causal reasoning, behind which there may be hidden an essential structure of (affective cultural) meaning. They move the attention away from this meaning, towards the linear story, the chains of cause and effect, the development of drama. This structure is created by other means than conscious reasoning (the left hemisphere and secondary processes, working through linear thinking, with its temporal/causal links). While discursive tales explicitly state their argument, symbolic, intuitive-creative or primary processes dissimulating the issue or pretending some argument, work through similarity and contrast. The symbolic truth is more easily driven home by contrast, when normality is violated and the implied truths are challenged, either in a horrifying (*e.g.* tragic) or in hilarious (comic) challenge. By rousing these reactions the tale confirms the very cultural boundaries in the sentiments of the audience, which are being violated in the tale.

The meaning then of a 'symbolic tale' is its *effect*. 'Symbolic tales' are indispensable to social life, they prove the unprovable, and order individual experience and action, or they transform individuals into groups mobilising them towards a common magnetic center. The same can be said of collective, culturally shared and exchanged, imagery. And in analysing these phenomena we have once more to be aware of the fact that symbolic phenomena are not simply representing reality, offering a picture, an experience of the world. They may challenge the normal world order of the group, creating disorder and provoking their cultural sentiments and

thereby revitalising that world. The example of the Greek manipulation of the 'the Amazons' illustrates this. Wherever they appear these anti-women provoke the culturally shaped image of the normal woman, no doubt in order to recreate it. Other tales may launch a new world subverting the established 'truths.'

We may then discuss how we should develop further methods for studying the 'symbolic' elements in Ancient culture taking account of the propositions made in this paper and refining the definition of the phenomena with which we are dealing.

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